SANG-E-MEEL PAPERBACKS

SAADAT HASAN MANTO

BLACK MILK

TRANSLATED FROM THE URDU

BY

HAMID JALAL

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

BLACK MILK

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

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HAMID JALAL

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to

ejaz ahmad

in memory of
a conversation

"The milk of human kindness.... if you'll pardon the cliche...flows in the breast of every Manto character ...."
"Its colour will have to be black if society is to accept that verdict...."

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It was my father who first translated Manto's writings into English. This was a task he began during Manto's lifetime, but the anthology "Black Milk" was not published till 1956.

In re-publishing the book over three decades later, I feel a sense of continuity, of redoing something my father had done out of affection and admiration for Manto. I hope that this edition will reach out to a new generation of readers who can enjoy the work of a unique writer.

Shahid Jalal

December, 1992.

translator's note

This book has been printed at a speed required for magazines. Although I started work on the translations during the life-time of Saadat Hasan Manto the book did not go to the printers until a few weeks ago. Then came the announcement that the P.E.N. International Conference was to meet in London in the first week of July, 1956. Work on the book was speeded up. The object was to introduce Manto to the world of literature at this Conference.

I must explain why of all the Urdu writers I should have selected Manto for such whole-sale introduction to readers of English. One reason was our relationship which is explained in the following article, Uncle Manto and the other his top position among writers of modern Urdu fiction. That is not the opinion of a hero-worshipping nephew, whose bona-fides are established in Uncle Manto, but the general opinion that grew during Manto's life-time and became universal at the time of his death. It was an opinion Manto himself shared and expressed in various forms. Exactly seventeen months before he died he wrote, in response to a request for an autograph, his own epitaph: Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto along with his art of story writing.... Even now under tons of earth he is wondering, who is a greater story writer -- he or God.

While Manto sorts out his problem with his Maker, the great majority of the critics of Urdu literature have already given their verdict on his position vis-a-vis the other writers of modern Urdu fiction. It ranges from the pessimistic "The Urdu short story died with Manto" to "He was the greatest short story writer in the history of Urdu literature." The least enthusiastic of the circles have described him as "a story writer not equalled by many among his contemporaries."

Several of these opinions have been expressed in articles written in English. It is but fair, therefore, that Manto should be rendered into English. BLACK MILK is the first instalment ; another volume of his short stories is also to be published in English. These will enable readers of English to judge Manto for themselves.

Saadat Hasan Manto's premature death at the age of forty two cut short a prolific career. In about sixteen years he wrote no less than three hunderd short stories, sketches, radio plays and essays to say nothing of his dozen or so screen plays. His greatest fame came from his short stories, although in every medium he was just as original and daring.

In a country where literacy does not necessarily mean corresponding interest in literature, Manto's name was known universally. This was due less to his own efforts and more to the government censors who repeatedly charged him with being obscene. Time and again he had to defend himself in the courts, he won almost every time. Only once did the High Court at Lahore -- order the banning of one of his short stories, *'Thanda Gosht'* (literal translation: Cold Flesh). Manto was very upset about it because it was only on reading the judgement in the newspapers that he came to know that the case had been heard by the Court. He was sure if he had known about the hearing he would have arranged for his defence himself. *'Tanda Gosht'* is one of his stories about the riots that took place at the partitioning of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. It deals with the reactions of a Sikh who carries off a young girl, rapes her only to discover that she is dead.

I have mentioned the subject of *'Thanda Gosht'* to show how daring he could be in the selection of his subjects. That alone, however, is not enough to establish a writer's claim to eminence. On the other hand a true literary artist knows that the more sensational his subject the greater his handicap in making a success of it. Such was the challenge that Manto always presented himself with, perhaps, to sharpen his literary wits.

BLACK MILK contains some of his stories which belong to the category defined by me in the above paragraph. The very first story, Odour also resulted in Manto being put on trial, but the

Court's verdict was in his favour. It is the story of a pervert, who on his wedding night is indifferent to his sweet scented bride because the pouring rain outside reminds him of the night he had slept in the same room and on the same bed with a factory girl whose body odour he cannot forget. A disgusting subject, it seems, but one that presented a challenge to Manto, a challenge he could not resist. Here again his literary genius triumphed.

Manto walked the tight-rope even where footpaths existed. He was not at ease with the accepted literary subjects. He seldom wrote about romance or love for he was too conscious of the sensual aspect of these sensous relationships. His sense of physical realism gave him an unusual story in an ordinary pimp-prostitute relationship. I am referring to the problem of *Khushia*, a pimp who one day finds before him, completely naked, a young prostitute for whom he touts. She had'nt turned a hair as he stared at her and had explained that she had left her bath to open the door for him because after all he was only *Khushia*. That hurts *Khushia's* masculine pride and sets him thinking and round his thoughts and actions Manto has created a story, which is probably the first of its kind in any literature.

There is a general tendency among critics to describe writers in terms of other writers who are already well known. Manto has been described, on various occasions, as Urdu literature's Maupassant, Chekhov or Kuprin. That is a practice Manto did not like for nothing was more sacred to him than a writer's individuality. Because of this I would not like to say which of the known western writers Manto resembles most. In fact he cannot be identified with anyone completely. He was influenced by many of them, but none can rob him of his claim to being the most original of all the Urdu short story writers.

If a comparison must be made I would select his Thaila the Pimp to be read along with Maupassant's *Mademsoille* Fifi. The theme is the same but the endings are different. Maupassant is almost sentimental when he makes a French prostitute kill a German officer because he makes disparaging remarks about her defeated country. In the end to make matters worse, from the literary point of view, Maupassant says that a French patriot who was broad minded married the prostitute. Manto's story is a side - light on the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in Amritsar. It is the

story of two beautiful dancing girls whose brother is killed shortly after he himself has strangled a British Tommy to death. To avenge themselves the British officers send for the sisters and ask them to perform, hardly a day after their brother's martyrdom. The person who is narrating the story says the sisters go, gaily dressed for the occasion, they dance and sing until the British officers give the significant order that dancing and singing should end. This order is the prelude to the real act of vengeance. The narrator tries to infuse patriotism into the sisters and says they tore of their dresses and cursed and spat fat the murderers of their brother. After that, he says, they were shot dead. Then comes the masterly and unemotional manto twist. The listener asks if that was the real end for something in the narrator's tone had made him suspect that he had not heard the truth. He was right for the sisters had put their profession above their patriotism.

This collection contains some of the best Urdu short stories ever written, stories that are landmarks in the history of modern Urdu literature. The Insult, Babu Gopinath, Mummy, Odour, Sakina, New Constitution and Khushia -- they show Manto at his best.

HAMID JALAL

uncle manto

THERE is no such person as Uncle Manto in my everyday vocabulary and if someone were suddenly to ask me about him I would not immediately know that he was referring to my youngest maternal uncle. I call him Saadat Mamajan, for we speak to each other in Punjabi. That is the language he normally speaks at home, except with his children whom he is bringing up on Urdu, his medium of literary expression. He finds it a great strain to have long conversations in Urdu and he avoids this, almost as he does writing in Punjabi.

As my relationship with him implies, I need not be a Manto. In fact, I am not one. For Uncle Manto this may come as a shock even though he has very generously conceded that all his likeable relatives cannot be Mantos. He can understand and, perhaps, even forgive my not being a Manto, but my openly declaring that I am not one -- well, I suppose that is my own funeral!

The fact is that even if I had been a Manto I would not have used the family name, for it now belongs less to the family and more to the person who has already made it so well known in Urdu literature. In the years to come, the name, Manto, is likely to be converted into an adjective to describe a literary trend or personality. It is on the latter aspect that I feel qualified to throw some light. My main problem, however, is to distinguish and differentiate between Saadat Hasan and Manto, for Saadat Hasan Manto is really a split personality. Saadat Hasan was born in Sambrala (now part of East Punjab) on the 11th of May, 1912 and he himself gave birth to manto as he neared the end of his schooldays.

It is not possible for me to set the exact date on which the Manto aspect of his personality began to assert itself, but perhaps, I would not be far off the mark if I narrated an incident to show

how it must have first manifested itself. He was not yet out of his teens, when master Khuda Buksh created a sensation in London; driving his car blindfolded through Piccadilly Circus. Shortly afterwards, there appeared in Amritsar a fire walker, who claimed to be Master Khuda Bukhsh's tutor. His name, I think, was Allah Rakha. Thousands flocked every day to see him walk unscathed across a shallow ditch full of glowing coals. One day, he went a step further; he announced that anyone who had faith in him and God could also follow his bare feet across the red hot ditch without any ill effects. The crowd took one look at the tiny flames, quickly painting the coal red, and shrank back as if Master Allah Rakha would force them to follow him. He repeated his invitation but the crowd held back in hushed silence.

Then a young man stepped forward. He seemed to have waited only to make sure that no one else would make the attempt. As the crowd began to murmur, the lanky youngster, at Master Allah Rakha's bidding, took off his shoes and socks and rolled up his trouser cuffs. "Draw in your toes and recite the Kalima.... Follow me." The crowd had hardly got over its surprise when Master Allah Rakha and the youngster had completed their journey over the burning coals. While the amazed youngster examined his feet for the non-existent burns and blisters, the crowd began to clap.

That was Saadat Hasan Manto's first public ovation. It was rather an unfortunate beginning of a public career, for Uncle Manto has been walking on fire ever since. He has had his share of public ovation, and a very big share it has been, but he has not always escaped the natural effects of fire. His public, however, seem to think that this is a part of the act and they watch with indifference while he makes half-hearted attempts to fight the flames that threaten to envelop him. I describe his attempts as half-hearted, because Uncle Manto seems to believe that fire-walking is a part of his public career as a writer and personality. Perhaps, subconsciously, he feels, that he will have no public ovation, if he does not indulge in feats that are as abnormal and dangerous as fire walking.

I could even say, that this subconscious fear is the key to his personality, but what holds me back is the fact, that his

personality has a very large number of facets and each calls for a separate unlocking device. A painstaking psycho-analyst could, perhaps, isolate, distinguish and list the various aspects of Uncle Manto's personality but for me that task is very difficult. When I look back on my association with him I feel that I am looking into a kaleidoscope; his literary activities, home life and behaviour as a dipsomaniac forming the three sides of the mirror prism and our common experiences representing the tiny fragments of coloured glass that form a new pattern every time the base is rotated.

To give a complete picture of Uncle Manto in this sketch is as impossible a task as copying out all the patterns that a kaleidoscope can produce. All I can do is to turn slowly the Manto kaleidoscope and describe and interpret the various personality patterns that are formed on the screen of my mind.

One such image that readily takes shape dates back to the days of his fire-walking exploit. I can see him in his study, at his writing table which is dominated by a huge brass motorcar-shaped inkpot. He whispers to me and I go out, to return some time later, after his usual group of cronies has assembled for its daily sitting. He introduces me to a couple of new friends whom I had not met before, explains that I have just arrived from Lahore and anxiously enquires whether any further news has reached Lahore about the Taj Mahal. I was then not yet ten, but having been properly briefed some minutes earlier, I replied, with all the gravity I could muster, " Yes, the news is correct Everybody in Lahore says that the Taj has been sold to the Americans." Uncle Manto and some of his more intimate friends pounced upon this statement of mine and convinced a gullible new comer to their fold that the rumour they had mentioned to him earlier was correct... the Taj Mahal had been sold by the British to the Americans, who were rushing special equipment to Agra to remove the monument to New York. By next day, several bazars in Amritsar buzzed with this rumour, while Uncle Manto sat back in his study and chuckled.

In those days Uncle Manto revelled in such rumour mongering and every rumour spread by him showed a creative mind at work. As a sort of side line he went about asking his friends to believe that his fountain pen was carved out of a donkey's horn

and things of that kind. He was the leader of a young group of intellectuals of Amritsar and prescribed for them several new phrases and conversational styles so that they could distinguish themselves from the general body of students.

Two of his expressions, which have gained wide currency these last twenty years or so, are his use of the words `fraud' and `kabab'. Today, a large number of persons use the word `fraud' as if it belonged to the Urdu or Punjabi languages and so far as Uncle Manto is concerned he uses the word not to describe an act but a personality. If any one lets him down or annoys him he has, to use Uncle Manto's expression made a `kabab' of him. The originality of his idiom was confusing for the outsider. If he wanted to know what a person thought about his shirt or fountain pen he would ask, "What is your button about this shirt?" Or "What is your nib about this pen?" The underlying reason, of course, was the urge to be different, to be independent of all traditions, to owe nothing to anybody; in short to be nothing else but Manto.

That, perhaps, was what led him to the bottle and it is even possible that his first drink was nothing but a fresh spurt to maintain a lead over his friends in the race to be different. It was a peculiar race, destined by its very nature to be endless; a race motivated not by a competitive spirit among the runners but by their unanimous desire to be different, not from each other, but from their fellow citizens.

As I visited Amritsar only occasionally, I could not watch this race from close quarters. In fact, even if I had lived in Amritsar or Uncle Manto had visited Lahore more often, the difference in our ages would have made it difficult for me to know all about his activities. Then he left for Bombay and the gulf between us widened. It was several years before we met again. The occasion was his visit to Lahore in the December of 1940, when his first book of short stories, *Manto ke Afsane*, was being published. I heard him giving directions regarding the dustcover, which was to be dominated by a portrait sketch of his, showing him with his shirt collar open and head thrown back in an attitude of defiance and arrogance. "Let it be drawn in such a way," he told the publisher, " that it should provoke people to abuse me."

I cannot say whether he said this to overawe his publisher or whether that was his view of the relationship that should exist between an author and his reading public. Personally, I think, the remark was not made deliberately and I doubt if Uncle Manto even remembers having made it, but it provides an important clue to his personality. His first object, perhaps, was to impress upon the publisher the fact, that, in dealing with Manto, he should discard his standards for normal persons. What is more important, it revealed Uncle Manto's aim to make his personality a part of his writings, because his study of literature must have convinced him that, generally what matters is not what is said, but who says it. He had before him examples of writers like Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, who won as much fame or should I say notoriety for their personalities as for their literary output. Uncle Manto was, perhaps, the first modern Urdu writer to have his picture on the dustcover of his book, as if to say, "I am as much the author of the personality of Manto as of his writings."

I doubt if anyone abused him, as he wanted, merely by looking at the dustcover of his book, which, incidentally, was designed by M. Ismail, the well-known film star, though later on this desire of his must have been more than fulfilled. Actually, Saadat Hasan himself, that is to say, when he was still himself, must have abused his creation as roundly as anyone else. The responsibility for the creation was his but while he had imagined himself a Pygmalion, his handiwork had followed in the footsteps of Mr. Hyde or Frankesten.

This monster, for in this context I can call him nothing else has been on the rampage for several years now. Attempts to tame him have not been very successful and this is mainly due to his absolute inability to resist alcohol. To illustrate this I will narrate an incident which involves hardly a few drops of whisky...

In August, 1953, Uncle Manto was removed to the Mayo Hospital suffering from acute jaundice. The doctor soon discovered that he actually had cirrhosis of the liver from which affliction hardly one in a thousand recovers. I was in Murree at that time and on the day I was to return I received a telegram saying that his condition was grave. On arriving at Rawalpindi I telephoned Lahore and was informed that the doctors had given

up the fight, that I would be too late and that he had been asking for me. Although I had been expecting some such end during the last few years the news that it was now in sight came as a big shock. The fact that he had been asking for me made it all the more poignant, for it filled me with the realisation that along with Manto, my Saadat Mamajan of the good old days also lay dying. It left me benumbed and helpless. The train journey by night seemed so futile, for the doctors had given him only a couple of hours more.

The reader will perhaps be wondering how many more words I am going to use to describe an incident involving a few drops of alcohol. Well, I am afraid that will have to wait, while I mention some other aspects of Uncle Manto's personality, the more lovable ones, which come naturally to a person in an obituarist's frame of mind.

I remembered a train journey we had taken together from Lahore. He was going to Bombay while I was to accompany him up to Delhi only. His luggage contained no less than a dozen pairs of sandals and gold embroidered *jootis*, which he always bought on his visits to Lahore and gave most of them away to his friends in the film industry. Footwear has always been an obsession with him. He not only wore the most expensive shoes, sandals and *jootis* himself; he loved giving them away. They always formed a topic of conversation for us. Whenever I went to Bombay I knew that he would come to the railway station to receive me in a new pair of shoes. I noticed them the moment we met, but a discussion on them was always postponed until we were in a taxi or gharry; where he would cross his legs and bring the shoes more prominently into the picture. He has never worn heavy shoes, for his feet are slim and almost effeminate. I do not remember having ever bought sandals for myself; every summer under some pretext or the other a pair or two are passed on to me. This continued even during the days Uncle Manto was in acute financial difficulties, days when nothing mattered, except alcohol. At times it seemed to me that next to alcohol, foot wear was his main interest in life. The last pair of sandals that I got from him was in exchange for a couple of razor blades.

I have always found him short of razor blades, because they are not difficult to buy. Tell him that a certain article or commodity

has gone underground and his eyes will light up and he will have taken up the challenge and start making rounds of the blackmarket. When I mention this characteristic of his, I am referring to his Bombay days, where he always had lots of money and I think the more exorbitant the price he had to pay the greater the satisfaction he derived. When gold and silver capped Parker and Sheaffers pens first came to India during the last war, Uncle Manto was a prolific buyer. He paid up to one hundred and fifty rupees for these models. He must have bought about ten of them and with the exception of one which he kept for himself he gave all of them away. It was their novelty; rather than utility, that attracted him, for he seldom used them. To write radio-plays or film scenarios he always uses his Urdu typewriter, which is a slower process but it gives him time to think, while for short stories and other articles he prefers a soft pencil which can help his hand keep pace with his thoughts. I have seen him write a complete short story in one sitting, in a room full of noisy children playing games and calling upon him to give rulings on disputed points, and also at the same time taking part in the general conversation of others who may be visitors or members of his family.

Why did he have to drink himself to death? That was the question that repeated itself to me as I travelled to Lahore that night. Instead of feeling sorry for him, I felt angry with him. It was unfair of him to have done so. It had all along been a fight between his love for his family and the magnetism of alcohol, and alcohol had won hands down. In the last few weeks I had suspected him of toying with the idea of suicide, either because it was the easiest way out or because he wanted to fill the family with remorse for having given him up as a hopeless case. I was certain that I would be too late for I had been told last night that he was already unconscious and in an oxygen tent.

It would be a defeat also for that astrologer in Bombay who had predicted a very long life for Uncle Manto but who had very correctly foretold bad times ahead. That was in 1946, when Uncle Manto was at the peak of his lucrative film career. The rot had set in almost immediately afterwards with a slump in the film industry and on migration to Lahore after Partition his condition worsened. The astrologer had warned Uncle Manto

that his Ketu or something like that, was about to slip into a bad orbit and that he would have seven lean years before all would be well with him again. I now read a new meaning into the astrologer's words. Perhaps he had meant that Uncle Manto would have a long life as a literary figure, while his seven year bad period would come to an end with physical death.

I arrived at the hospital, bracing myself for the worst. I was met by a cluster of red-eyed relatives who told me that he was still alive. I could not ask any questions for there was a lump in my throat. I went into the ward and immediately stopped at the foot of his bed, which was nearest to the door. I shall never forget what I saw.

On the bed was a skeleton of a man and all that I could see of his face, partially covered with shaving lather was a pair of very prominent eyes, yellowed with jaundice. Yes, I said shaving lather, and the person leaning over him was no doctor's assistant either. He was the hospital barber and he was trying to hear what the patient was saying with his very feeble voice. With a great effort, Uncle Manto took a trembling bony hand up to his chin and moved his fingers across it. The barber then understood him. "Sahib says it is not smooth enough." He explained to us as he reached for his shaving brush. I went up to Uncle Manto, not knowing whether to cry or laugh. His insistence on being clean shaven, when he might not have lived another few hours, was an anti-climax. It was almost like the ending of a Manto short story.

I met the doctors but they just shook their heads and said that the case was hopeless. They held on to this view for another two weeks in spite of the daily improvement shown by Uncle Manto. Statistics, they said, were against him, to say nothing of the various blood test reports. Being such a hopeless case the doctors did not at once completely stop his whisky. His system was too used to it and they allowed him a few drops two or three times a day.

A day or two after my arrival from Murree there was a mild sensation when a glass of diluted whisky disappeared from a side-table near Uncle Manto's bed. Had it been thrown away by mistake or had one of the hospital attendants drained it off? no one knew. Uncle Manto was beyond suspicion. Most of the time

he lay in a coma and when he was conscious he could not even support a cigarette placed in his mouth. When the time came, for his afternoon quota he managed, with his feeble gestures, to attract attention and whisper a reminder. The attendant who bent down to hear what he was saying caught a faint smell of whisky coming from Uncle Manto. It was with great difficulty that he was made to confess that he had already had the drink. We asked him who had given it to him and learnt to our astonishment, that, he whose fingers could not hold a cigarette for more than a few seconds had raised himself on his elbow, picked up the glass, which a careless nurse had left there before time, and after finishing it had replaced it on the table.

It showed amazing will power but it also showed that his fight was not against the disease: it was for it. The doctors were in despair for the deterioration in his condition a few days earlier had followed a successful attempt by his bottle friends to smuggle in some whisky for him. The doctors now took a drastic step. They completely stopped his whisky.

This had just the effect I had anticipated. He started getting hallucinations. This had happened once before, too. He had got up at the dead of night and started seeing things and talking about them. He had frightened us all, for it seemed as if he had lost his mind. When I came on the scene he was insisting that his wife fry the huge fish that an Anglo Pakistani neighbour had just sent him. On seeing me he took my arm and we both walked out of the flat. He began shouting the name of the Anglo-Pakistani and it was with great difficulty that I dragged him back into the house. For the first few minutes I did not quite know how to deal with the situation and just mumbled a few answers to his questions. He was talking in the most terribly normal manner possible. The only thing wrong was the subject matter of his conversation. He wanted me to accompany him to another neighbour's house, where he said some singing girls were performing. He wanted to hear their Punjabi song which he repeated as he `heard' it.

Banking on his intelligence, I took a risk. I abruptly told him that he was in the grip of hallucinations, that the Anglo-Pakistani neighbour who he thought had just given him the fish had been transferred from Lahore over six months ago, that no

one was singing anywhere in the vicinity and that the only sounds in the stillness of the night were our voices. After a moment's silence, he said. "Then I suppose there are no sparrows fluttering their wings in that corner either?"

"No," was my reply.

"The voice of the singing girl is still coming through ... I'll write down the song." He did so for about a minute.

"We can hear no such song," I remarked.

He asked his wife and some other members of the family who had come to the sitting room whether they heard the song. They all said no. He stopped writing, but insisted that he could still hear the song. Gradually he began to distinguish reality from imagination, and just before he reluctantly went to bed, he said to me. "I am very sorry about that fish. It was a good fish."

I do not quite remember what had caused the hallucinations but I think it was because he had suddenly given up both drink and food. At the hospital the attack was worse and it lasted almost a week. Most of the time he imagined himself to be in Bombay where he had spent the happiest period of his life. Every day I would tell him that he was in Lahore, but he found it very hard to believe that. Perhaps, he did not want to believe it for his stay in Lahore since Partition had been an unhappy one. His hallucinations moved in strange grooves. One day he read out to me an imaginary news item from a newspaper. "Reports have been received of a successful police raid on liquor shops. The police arrested six empty bottles, twenty two playing cards and a dancing girl." I interpreted this as a denunciation by him, in his hallucinatory state, of the kill-joys around him.

He had come through the more dangerous part of his illness with courage and fortitude, but as he grew better he became peevish. He wanted to do all sorts of things that were forbidden; he demanded tabooed food and drink that would have killed him in a few hours and he wanted to walk, which the doctors said he should not even think of attempting before another month or so. But the urge to walk was irresistible; he wanted to electrify the ward with his feat, he wanted to prove that Manto could do it. He made a clandestine attempt but it was if he had stepped into a

red hot ditch with legs of butter. They just melted away and he was lucky to escape with minor injuries when his bony frame struck concrete floor.

This was but one result of his obstinacy. A twenty four hour watch had to be kept on him. There was no knowing what he might do. His eyes and mind all the time seemed to be searching for a glowing coal on which he could step bare footed. His attitude during his peevish moods was of a person who by getting well was doing a good turn to his doctors and relatives. This attitude sometimes made me rather bitter towards him and this surprised the scores of his friends and fans who came to see him daily. Some of them wanted him to shift to some other bed for it was in the same bed that Akhtar Shirani, the poet, had died some years earlier, while others did not like the ward itself for Uncle Manto's old friend, Abdul Bari, the well known historian, had also breathed his last here. My bitterness was mainly due to the apprehension that all this fight for his life would be in vain if he took to the bottle again. I hoped against hope that he would not, but his so-called friends took only a couple of months to convince him that he never had cirrhosis or he would never have recovered and Uncle Manto was at the bottle again.

I found out the very day he had his first drink after his recovery, although he denied it vehemently. This also is a peculiar habit of his. He cannot hide the effects of even a peg of whisky or gin but he deludes himself into thinking that he can hold his drink well. Any reference to this physical disability of his hurts his vanity. I wish he would realise that alcohol is damaging him in more ways than one. I would say it has ravaged his personality far more than his health.

Hardly ten years ago his home was one of the happiest I have ever known. One hardly noticed what one ate at his dining table for the main attraction was his witty conversation and the happy laughter of the family and friends gathered around it. He always had guests in his modest little flat in Bombay. What brought them there was his unobtrusive hospitality. If ever the guests out numbered the beds, Uncle Manto was always the first to spread out his bedding on the floor. Sometimes he even ran short of floor space and he never hesitated to sleep on the old creaking planks of the narrow passage leading to the lavatory. He never

made a show of his sacrifice, to say nothing of the inconvenience caused to his uncomplaining wife. The whole thing was managed in such a manner that the arrangement was accepted by all as natural.

I personally felt the first impact of his new personality at the dining table. He usually drank in the evenings and became unpleasant and aggressive in his conversation during dinner. Almost every evening we had sharp arguments over trifles and lost our tempers. I was unreasonable perhaps because even under the influence of drink I expected him to behave normally. Whenever I visited Bombay, I came to dread the evenings for I knew I would not be able to tolerate the alcohol-powered personality masquerading as Uncle Manto. The only way out was not to meet him in the evenings and that is what I did.

Since Partition we have been living in almost the same house, my first floor flat being connected with his on the ground floor. His resistance to drink weakened and the proximity of a bar made it possible for him to drink throughout the day. His favourite route, which he thought was secret, was through the bathroom. Several times a day he would proceed to the bathroom, bolt it noisily from inside, turn on the tap, quitely open the other door leading out of the flat, rush to the bar through the back lane, have a quick gin and return the same way. Once on his return he immediately began to talk about the tactical genius of General Rommel and I could not help imagining the German commander in full uniform, riding a tank through the streets of Cairo on a secret reconnaissance before the El Alamein battle!

Later, with the coming of prohibition the bar closed, but the bathroom still remained important in his alcoholic life. He usually hid his bottle there and went in every fifteen or thirty minutes to have a nip. Once I saw the bottle behind the commode. It filled me with pity for when sober nothing is more important to Uncle Manto than hygiene. He is known for his snow white starched *kurta* and *pyjama*; his hand-writing is neat and clean, he never types unless he has thoroughly cleaned his typewriter, he never writes on cheap or smudgy paper and he never eats off a plate that is not spotless nor drinks from a glass that is not as clean. He would rather wash them himself. For

such a person to drink straight from a bottle hidden behind a leaky flush commode is possible only when the compulsion must have a tremendous force.

Under such circumstances we stopped seeing each other even during the day and sometimes it was weeks before we came across one another. I was, of course, aware of his activities most of which would have caused any normal person to boil with rage. He would be most irresponsible and unreasonable. He could not sleep at all during the nights and had to take a swig at the bottle every half hour or so. Sometimes, his hazily made calculations would be wrong and in the middle of the night he would find himself left without any drink. Then the ordeal would begin for the family. One by one all of us would wake up to hear him shouting accusations at his wife whom he suspected of having located the bottle and reducing its contents by pouring them down the sink.

Sometimes he would run out of cigarettes and he would keep on shouting for his servant every ten minutes asking him to go to the bazar and get him a packet. The servant's report, after his first attempt, that no shop was open would have no effect on him: he would repeat his command at regular intervals, until through sheer exhaustion he would doze off or fall into a sort of coma.

In the quiet night his almost incoherent shouting sounded terrible. At first all the family used to gather in his flat and try to persuade him to go to sleep but this was given up when these persuasions had no effect on him. His nocturnal shouting and storming continued and as usual woke up his family and mine, but none of us left our beds any longer. We lay awake, our hearts pounding, not speaking a word, but with the same thoughts in our minds. When would his ordeal and ours end? I cannot speak for the others, but I know that for me the ordeal will never end. Even when he was in hospital any shout in the night was enough to wake me up and agitate me.

I have often wondered whether it is normal for a writer's family to pay some such price for his literary eminence. Uncle Manto knows all about his weaknesses and once he came out with an excuse, which some others, too, may offer on his behalf. He said

that in order to write he must undergo various experiences, however unpleasant and painful they might be. He may be right to a certain extent but he would find it difficult to list more than dozen stories written by him under the influence of liquor. The fact is that he can write only when he is sober. I am aware of certain stories written by him during his "lost week-ends" but their quality is such that he now even denies their authorship. Why then must he drink?

Ask him the question and he will love to discuss it with you. He will probably even ask for help to fight the evil; readily offer himself for psychoanalysis and supply all the information required by his friends to make amateurish attempts to find out the causes and suggest remedies for his dipsomania. He will flatter and encourage them by agreeing with their conclusions and accepting their interpretations and make them feel that they are the first to treat his case scientifically and sympathetically. All the while he will be making regular trips to the hidden bottle and come back to encourage his friends to further psycho-analytical efforts and grow progressively unsteadier with every new promise that he would give up drinking for ever. After their departure, I suppose, he chuckles to himself as he did the day the bazars of Amritsar buzzed with the rumour about the Taj Mahal.

Only once in his life--as far as I can remember--did Uncle Manto make a serious attempt to give up drinking. His condition was daily growing worse when his wife told him about my suggestion that he be taken for treatment to Alcoholic Ward of the Punjab Mental Hospital. The next day, much to my surprise, I heard him call my name as I passed his room. I went in and found him in bed, his face turned away towards the wall to prevent me from seeing the real state he was in. He said, "I am prepared to go to the hospital ... please make the arrangements."

I made an appointment for him for the very next day but he disappeared some time before we were due to leave for the hospital and did not reappear until several hours later. He had not baulked at the last minute. The reason was quite different. He had heard that the Superintendent's fee was thirty two rupees and had gone out to raise the amount. During his palmy days in Bombay, consulting the most expensive doctor, who charged sixty four rupees for consultation alone, was almost a hobby

with him. He once even took his servant to one such doctor with the intention of paying the full fee. For the doctor the situation was novel: his clients were usually millionaires who probably never even sent their poorer relations to him. He took only thirty two rupees, half his normal fee.

Thirty two rupees! That amount had not stood between him and the doctor. In those days he was still particular about whom he borrowed from. He got the money somehow and was admitted to the hospital, had a very difficult time for the first few days and came out after six weeks. He was effectively cured and did not drink again for about eight months. During that period he wrote almost a book a month; at times the rate was a story a day. Then he relapsed and the attack was worse than before. He was drunk all the time and since he was in that state he could not write. His earnings dropped to zero.

Uncle Manto then started on a course which distressed the family even more than his addiction to the bottle. He began borrowing money indiscriminately. The amount or the person never mattered. He touched relatives, friends, neighbours and I would say even strangers for he could not resist borrowing even from fans who came only to pay their respects to him. He was almost on a never ending binge during 1952 and up to August 1953, when he was removed to hospital for cirrhosis of the liver. During that period, we once took him to the Mental Hospital by force but he refused to cooperate and the hospital authorities had to let him go home, after a couple of days, for under the rules of their institution they could not treat any sane person against his will. Uncle Manto was very bitter towards the family after that. But then in those days he hardly knew what he was doing.

I remember those days as vividly as a nightmare. His eldest daughter fell seriously ill and I noted with dismay that this made not the slightest impression on him. His drinking had never before been as bad as this. He has always professed great love for his children and has shown it in many ways. For instance, he has never failed to rally in time for Pakistan Day celebrations. Like most other intellectuals, he cannot make a flag of his patriotism and flutter it from his house-top, but he wants his children to do so. He has always sobered up for Pakistan Day, bought buntings and with the help of the delighted children put

up the little flags all over the front of his flat and mine. Last time a daughter of his fell ill he had nursed her himself and dedicated a book to her.

When his eldest daughter was down with typhoid he must have been vaguely aware of the act that there was little money in the house and that the treatment was bound to be expensive. That evening he borrowed money in the name of his daughter but when he came home it was with a bottle of whisky rather than the vital medicines. It was alcohol's most important victory to date. He must have been full of remorse and self-condemnation for he tried to make up by demonstrating his love for the stricken child. In spite of his wife's protests he sat unsteadily on the bed, his long hair falling all over his face, and tried to lift the child on to his lap and overwhelm her with paternal affection. When his wife dragged him away from the bed, he was enraged; he was determined to exercise his parental right even if it meant resorting to violence. Before he could do so my wife, who was a witness, unexpectedly lost her temper, probably for the first time in her mild mannered life. That came as a terrible shock to Uncle Manto. He sobered down immediately and quietly went away to his room.

Next morning we found him extremely weak for he had again given up drinking. There was sunshine again in the Manto home and everyone basked in it, hoping to make it permanent. Vitamin tablets and tonics appeared on his bedside table. Another periodical cycle began in Uncle Manto's life and soon he was pottering about the house; having the broken chairs mended, selling empty bottles and old newspapers--an old hobby of his, fixing a swing for the children, making a huge bird-house and stocking it with love-birds, hiring carpenters and masons to repair various things and parts of the house, making sofa sets for the children with empty cigarette cartons and taking full part in discussions on all domestic and family matters.

In these discussions Uncle Manto always reveals himself as conservative and almost a reactionary on issues like women's education and mixed social gatherings. Whenever he expresses his views on these matters I cannot help identifying him with a character he has had in mind for over ten years but has not yet written about him. The character is a goonda, who is the terror of

the town and has a hand in almost every murder, robbery, abduction and assault, but no sooner does he enter the *mohalla* in which he lives, a transformation takes place. He no longer walks erect, his eyes are on the ground, the children call out to him to play with them and he obliges, the elders have but to command and their wishes are fulfilled, he does not look at women but if he hears that anyone has dared even to smile at a girl in his *mohalla,* God help the *Manju!*

But the sunshine in the Manto home does not last long. No sooner has his strength been built up, which the family hopes he will use to resist alcohol, than he succumbs to temptation again.

Usually the cause of these relapses are his companions. I have deliberately not used the word friends because there is a dividing line between his real friends and the pretenders. His real friends now always remain in the background because they do not approve of his drinking and because they are free and frank with him about other matters as well. He prefers to have around him companions who can assure him at frequent intervals that he is a great writer and a great personality, whom even cirrhosis could not touch. They have had a very bad influence on him. With them he is always the centre of attraction and he can snub or insult them as he pleases. He must have undivided attention even if he has to stand up on his chair to demand it.

One evening after the Pakistan cricket team had returned from its tour of India, Uncle Manto heard that some of the team members, including Waqar Hasan and Mahmood Hussain had come to call on me. Although he was in a condition in which he never came to my flat he turned up to meet the cricketers. He was introduced, after which he sat along with several others listening to what the cricketers had to say about their India tour. But how long could Uncle Manto take a back seat? I use the term in a figurative sense, for he was actually sitting in a chair in the inner ring, in which also sat the cricketers. Hardly five minutes after the arrival, he slipped down from his chair, sat on the carpet in the centre of the room, stopped Mahmood Hussain in the middle of a sentence and said, "I know all fast bowlers are frauds. Come on, demonstrate to me how you bump the ball." Waqar Hassan also had to show to Uncle Manto how he played some of his "fraud strokes." The rest of the evening was

dominated by Uncle Manto ; the other fans did not get a chance to have a word with the Test cricketers.

Why this desire to focus the spotlight on himself? I have only one explanation for it. In the last few years he has lost much prestige at home and among his relatives and friends. This has hurt him more than he would ever admit. He is hungry for love and affection and when he does not get it, he falls back on drawing attention to himself. It is a poor substitute but it is better than being ignored altogether. For the family and his true friends I would say that they want to return the love and affection he has given them ungrudgingly and unselfishly in his happier days; all they want is a chance, a chance to return it to the right personality. His attitude seems to be, "Love Saadat Hassan; forgive and forget Manto." This is not unacceptable, only experience has shown that Manto usually leads Saadat Hassan by the nose.

Also, Uncle Manto has all along been aware of the ramifications of his self-made personality. I came to know this in rather interesting circumstances. I was in Bombay and was invited by Ashok Kumar and Savak Vacha of Bombay Talkies to give my views on a screenplay Uncle Manto was writing for them. It was a powerful story, but the role tailored for Ashok Kumar, who was to be the hero, was completely over-shadowed by another personality, an alcoholic and sadist. I vigorously advocated reducing the importance of this character, but Uncle Manto was adamant. During the discussion he happened to leave the room for a few moments and Ashok Kumar at once whispered to me. "What are you doing, don't you know he is to act that himself?" But that did not stop me from saying what I wanted to. I was as frank and harsh as I have been in this article, which Uncle Manto had read, as it was being written, page by page, without a single protest. Ultimately, in that discussion Uncle Manto said that he wanted to act the role himself because he had based the character or himself. In the screenplay that character was killed by his own mother.

The only meaning I can read into this is his realisation that the only person who can end the dangerous trend in the Manto personality is its creator, Saadat Hasan himself. Some of his fans may fear that this would mean the end of his literary career. I do

not agree. In fact I think such a change would lead to the widening of his canvas. The family, particularly his wife, would not be very sorry even if he had to change his profession. So far as they are concerned he might as well be a carpenter. Before the snobs and highbrows cry sacrilege I would hasten to add that I agree with the family. Appreciating literature is one thing, producing it for bread and butter is quite another, particularly in a country where a best selling writer like Uncle Manto hardly gets more than fifty rupees for a short story.

Uncle Manto has earned more money in the field of literature than any other Urdu writer of his time. Unlike most others, he is entirely dependent on his pen for his living. The secret of Uncle Manto's success is his effective coordination as author and salesman. Botn occupations are strenuous, taxing his mind and sapping his vitality. In Uncle Manto's case the strain is continuous. He perhaps first stuck to liquor as a tonic to revitalise him. This started a vicious circle. His way of living has always been expensive; he loved to engage taxis when buses could have served the purpose, whatever he bought was of the best quality; clothes, pens, paper, cigarettes, shoes, neckties, railway accommodation and medical advice. All was well so long as the film companies paid him handsomely for his screenplays and scenarios, but then came the slump in the Indian film industry and his migration to Pakistan. To earn more he had to write more, to write more he felt he must have more of his self prescribed tonic, the more he drank the less he wrote, the less he wrote the more worried he became, the more worried he became the more he drank to forget his worries.

That is the nature of the whirlpool in which Uncle Manto now finds himself, struggling hard to prevent himself from being drawn deeper into the vortex.

He is no longer happy for unlike the fire-walking exploit there is now no applause and, what is worse, on touching his feet, he finds that after all these years blisters have now made their appearance. But he is now struggling hard for existence, both physical and spiritual.

Occasionally the struggle is weakened by a relapse caused by a bottle thrown into the whirlpool by unwise friends but it is

firmer and more consistent than it was before his last and almost fatal visit to the hospital.

To restore his family's confidence in him he has done several things to keep himself in check and break out of the vicious circle and, perhaps, force his *ketu* into a more auspicious orbit. He has signed away all his rights in his writings, past, present and future. All accounts are now in his wife's name. He cannot now borrow even a rupee from any publisher, unless his wife signs the receipt.

But his wife is still not reconciled to literature. She has had to pay too heavy a price for Uncle Manto's success and notoriety. If Uncle Manto has suffered in the cause of literature, she has suffered more. It was not surprising, therefore, for me to learn of her concern, genuine and grave, on hearing that I too had literary pretensions and was developing into a writer, She said to my wife, her younger sister, "I hope this is not true, pray that he may never be a writer or you'll regret it all your life."

POSTSCRIPT

(Uncle Manto died on the 18th of January 1955, about six months after the publication of the above article.)

I have often wondered what I would say to Uncle Manto if he returned home from his grave in Miani Sahib. I am certain I would overlook the miracle of resurrection and say to him, "Of all the irresponsible things you ever did, the most irresponsible was your death."

I was at Cricket Stadium in Bahawalpur, helping Bobby Talyarkhan with the running commentary on the second Indo-Pakistan Test, when I received a phone call from Lahore. "Saadat Hasan Manto died this morning," I was told. I was not immediately overwhelmed with grief. My first reaction was of anger. I was very angry. How could he do this to his family? But that is not what I said. When I spoke, my voice was full of concern. "Where did he die?" I asked. "At home," was the reply. I was relieved for I was afraid he might have died suddenly anywhere else ... in a tonga, a restaurant, a publisher's office, a film studio....

As I returned to my seat my colleagues in the Commentators Box made signs to me, wanting to know what had happened. I picked up my writing pad and scribbled. "the Umpire has at last given Saadat Hasan Manto out. He died this morning." Uncle Manto had survived many appeals. Now his impatient and erratic innings had come to an end. Had he been a cricketer he could never have been a steady and careful batsman like Hanif Mohammad, whom he wanted to see in action in Lahore in the third Test. This I learnt on my return home, twenty four hours after his death. In fact, that was one of his last two wishes. The evening before he died, he had said to some of his friends in a restaurant, "Let Hamid Lala come home. I'll go with him to see Hanif in the Test match".

His second wish was to write about the tragic death of lonely young woman whose nude body had been found on the roadside in Gujrat. According to newspaper reports published that day she and her little baby had died of exposure after she had been kidnapped from a waiting room of a bus terminal, ravished by over half a dozen brutes and allowed to run out of their den, without a stitch of clothing, into the freezing wintery night. This report had moved Uncle Manto very deeply. The same evening he had met some people from Gujrat, who I am told gave him some more information about the tragedy. This must have excited him no end and if I can reconstruct that evening, it must have resulted in his having more than his normal quota of alcohol. That proved fatal. Shortly after he returned home, late in the evening, he vomited blood. My six-year old son, who happened to be near him, pointed out the streaks of blood, but Uncle Manto said, "No, that is pan spittle... and don't you tell anyone about it." After that he had his normal dinner and went to bed. No one in the family suspected that anything was wrong for my son had kept Uncle Manto's secret. Perhaps, Uncle Manto himself thought that it was nothing serious. Normally, he tried to keep the family in the dark about such relapses because it meant the inevitable advice : stop drinking.

It was in the early hours of the morning that he woke up his wife and told her that he was in terrible pain and that he had lost much blood. His liver must have disintegrated. When his wife found that she could not cope with the situation by herself, she

woke up other members of the family. Then the fight began to save his life. Because of his numerous recoveries no one thought, at that stage, that he had only a few hours more to live. The fact, however, was that the Umpire had started raising his finger the moment Uncle Manto had first vomited that evening.

From what I have heard of Uncle Manto's last hours, I think he himself did not know that this was the absolute end, until an hour or so after the doctor had given him some injections. He did not rally as he always did after this treatment. His pulse continued to be bad and his pain increased. He lost more blood. In the morning the doctor suggested that Uncle Manto be taken to the hospital.

Uncle Manto was quite conscious. When he heard about the hospital, he protested, "Its too late now...don't shift me about. Let this disgraceful life end...let me die here in peace."

This was too much for some of the womenfolk. They started sobbing. This made him very angry. "I don't want anyone to cry," he said, irritably, as he hid his face under the quilt. This was the real Manto. The man who had always lived his life in full view of others did not want anyone to see him die.

His whole behaviour showed that he was angry, perhaps, with himself or with alcohol that was bringing about his premature death.

Only once or twice before the ambulance arrived, did he take the quilt away from his face. He said, "I am feeling very cold, colder than I will be in the grave--get me more quilts." He paused and with a strange gleam in his eyes, he added, "In my coat packet are three rupees eight annas, give them and some more money to someone...and get me some whisky..." He insisted and to placate him a quarter bottle was brought for him. He looked at the bottle with a strange feeling of satisfaction.

"Warm up a peg or so," he said, and he shuddered as the spasms of pain grew more intense.

There was no self pity in his eyes. He knew he was dying but not once did he become sentimental. He did not ask for his children or anyone else. He never believed in last looks or last words. For persons like him the dividing line between life and

death is very thin, and that is as it should be, for his soul had already been transferred from his body to his books. There he is assured of immortality, there he will go on living, laughing, loving. On his death bed, Uncle Manto did not call for anything except whisky. Long ago he had recognized whisky as his mortal enemy and he had come to regard it as synonmous with Death over which there can be no physical victory. As every man is powerless before Death, so Uncle Manto was before whisky.

But it was his nature to defy everything, even Death. He also hated defeat, even at the hands of Death. That was the reason why he wanted to die alone, unobserved--undefeated! A lesser man would have tried to stage manage his death--for various reasons, for posterity to write and talk about, for his relatives and friends to say that though he had lived a life they did not approve, he had died repentant and a good man, but Uncle Manto was no hypocrite. He resisted the temptation. His only dramatic gesture was his asking for whisky. This was stage managing his death scene, but only for the benefit of the main actor. He alone understood the significance of the gesture.

Had I been present, I feel certain, he would have given me a hint of what was in his mind. That would not have been difficult. All he would have had to do would have been to say, "Remember the story of the man and the snake?" I would have nodded my head and given him a last drink of whisky. That sentence would have made everything clear. His reference would have been to a man, who despite the warning of his friends kept a deadly poisonous snake as his pet and who on being fatally bitten by the snake caught the reptile and bit off its head.

Just as the ambulance arrived, he again asked for his drink. A spoonful was put to his lips, but he hardly swallowed a drop; the rest dribbled out of his mouth as he collapsed. That was the first time he had lost consciousness. In that state he was carried to the ambulance.

On arrival at the hospital the doctors stepped into the ambulance to examine him. They found him dead. He had died on the way without regaining consciousness.

odour

IT was again the monsoon season.

Drops of rain had begun their patter on the leaves of the pepal tree near the window. Inside lay the teak bed on which a Ghatan girl had slept with Randhir.

Beyond the window, in the night's milky darkness, the pepal leaves bathed in the rain, quivering like earings.

On the spring mattress of the bed, the Ghatan girl had clung to Randhir like goose-flesh. Some hours earlier, he had seen her under the tamarind tree, sheltering from the downpour. She probably worked in the rope factory nearby. Randhir had watched her from his balcony where he had come for a change from the mustiness of his room. He had wanted a diversion, for all afternoon he had done nothing but read the same newspaper again and again. He had cleared his throat and coughed. This had attracted her attention and he had beckoned her to come up.

For several days he had been feeling very lonely and dejected. One reason was the war which had put beyond his reach those Anglo-Indian girls who used to come out with him for the evening and even for the night. They were not expensive and because of his English education he had preferred to date them rather than go to the brothels. With the coming of the war, some of them had enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Corps, others had joined the newly opened dancing schools in the Fort Area. As only tommies were admitted to these schools, Randhir had felt frustrated. His favourite girls had gone off the market. The only ones available were in the dancing schools where white skin was the passport for admission; nothing else mattered. This had made Randhir very bitter for he had felt that he was better educated, more refined and healthier than the average tommy.

Before the war, Randhir had many a rendezvous with his girl friends of the Nagpada and Taj Mahal Hotel areas. He knew more about these girls, physically, than did the Christian boys with whom they flirted, until they married the most gullible of them.

Randhir had called the Ghatan girl over to his flat because he had been hurt by the airs Hazel had put on since her enlistment. Every morning he would see her leave her flat, directly below this own , in her uniform, her khaki cap set at a rakish angle walking as if all passers-by were only waiting to spread themselves out, like sacking on the pavement, for her to walk on.

Randhir had often wondered why he was so attracted by girls like Hazel. Was it because they made themselves physically attractive by accentuating their curves and contours or was it for their lack of inhibitions? They never felt abashed at referring to their menstrual irregularities, they told stories about their former lovers, their feet automatically tapped the floor on hearing a dance tune and in bed they were like patent medicines with directions for use.

When Randhir had beckoned the Ghatan girl, he did not have any intention of taking her to bed. Noticing her drenched clothes he had thought that the poor girl might get pneumonia and had said, "Take off these wet clothes, you may catch a cold."

She had understood him, though she did not know his language. Red webs of shame had suddenly floated in her eyes. When Randhir had handed her a fresh white *dhoti,* she had hesitated for a moment and then abruptly she had loosened her dirty coarse *kashta,* made filthier by the rain. As the soaked garment collapsed round her legs she had swiftly covered her thighs with the *dhoti*. She had then tried to take off her tight *choli* by opening a tiny knot, almost embedded in the deep and narrow hollow between her brests.

Her worn out nails had pecked at the tiny wet knot several times but had failed to loosen it. In despair, she had said something to Randhir in Marathi, which meant, "What am I to do, it won't open."

Randhir had sat down beside her and investigated the knot. But soon, he had lost his patience and gripping the strings on either side of the knot he had given a sudden jerk. At once the string had snapped and his hands had brushed over her breasts, which had come trembling into view. For a moment Randhir had felt like a potter, using freshly kneaded clay, who had suddenly moulded two cups on the Ghatan girl's chest. Her breasts had the pliancy, the moist roughness and the cooling warmth of vessels that have just come off the potter's wheel. Spotless and mud coloured, they had shone dully with a strange glow which seemed to come from a luminous layer beneath her translucent skin. Her uplifted breasts had looked like lamps lit at the bottom of a muddy pool.

It was again the season of rains.

Beyond the window the pepal leaves had dripped with rain. The Ghatan girl's soaked two-piece dress was on the floor in a filthy heap. The girl had clung to Randhir. The warmth of her nude unwashed body had reminded him of a hot bath in winter in a filthy public *hammam*.

All night she had clung to Randhir, as if they were one. They had hardly exchanged a word or two for their panting was as eloquent as their lips and hands were expressive. All night, Randhir's hands had fondled her breasts like the caress of the breeze. Occasionally, her dark areola, with their coarse grain and the tiny nipples, had stiffened and started a tremor that would streak through her body and communicate itself even to Randhir.

Randhir had experienced such tremors hundreds of times and was familiar with the delicious sensation they imparted. He had spent many nights with girls , clasping their taut or soft breasts against his own. He had slept with all sorts of girls, simple and talkative ones who gave him information about their families that no stranger should know, and the type who bore all the physical burden in bed and would not let him exert himself. But this Ghatan girl who had come up to his flat, from her shelter under the tamarind tree, had been quite different.

All night Randhir had inhaled a strange odour from her body, an odour both unpleasant and pleasant. He had sought for it in her armpits, her hair , breasts, navel and in every other part of her

body, where it could pervade his nose. He had thought that he would never have felt the nearness of the girl but for this odour which had penetrated every layer of his mind and had seeped through his memories, new and old.

For one night, Randhir and the girl had been fused together by this odour; they had merged into one another and slipped down to fathomless depths where they had been transformed into pure ecstasy, a state which they thought would be perpetual in spite of its evanescance, and still and stable even though there were fluctuations. They had been like a little bird that soars into the blueness of the sky, higher and higher, until it becomes a motionless dot.

Randhir was familiar with the odour which had exhaled from every pore of the Ghatan girl's body, but he had not been able to analyse it. It was like the fresh smell of earth sprinkled with water but no, this odour was different. It was not an artificial smell like that of lavender or attar, but something natural and eternal, like the relationship that has existed between man and woman since the beginning of time.

Randhir hated perspiration. After a bath he usually powdered his armpits or used deodorants. It was surprising that he had kissed the hairy armpits of the Ghatan girl many times... Yes, many times, and had felt no aversion. In fact, it had given him a peculiar feeling of pleasure. The tiny hair in the armpits, bedewed with perspiration, had given off the same odour which had been obvious and yet so incomprehensible. Randhir had felt that he knew this odour, that he recognized it, understood it, but he could not describe it to any one else.

The monsoons were back again.

Randhir looked out of the window and saw the swaying pepal leaves bathing in the rain; the sound of their rustle and patter merging in the atmosphere. The night was dark, not pitch dark, but of the darkness that seemed to have absorbed some subdued pearly light, washed down from the stars by the rain drops. The season was the same, when there was only one teak bed in the room, but now another lay beside it. In the corner stood a new dressing table.

It was again the season of rains.

The rain drops were flushing the stars of their milky light, but the atmosphere was filled with the strong perfume of henna. One of the beds was empty. On the other lay Randhir looking beyond the window at the dance of the rain drops on the swaying pepal leaves, By his side was a milky white girl who had fallen asleep trying unsuccessfully to cover her nakedness. Her red silk shalwar lay on the other bed, one end of its dark red cord dangling by its side. Also flung on this bed were the other clothes of which she had been stripped, her green shirt with red flowers to match the shalwar, her brassiere, underwear and dupatta. All were red, very red, and scented with henna.

Gold powder lay in the girls black hair, like dust. The blurred make up on her face... a mixture of gold dust, powder and rouge... was like a pallid mask of death. Her creamy breasts were blotched with the colour of her red brassiere.

Her breasts were as white as milk, a whiteness that has a faint tinge of blue. Randhir glanced at the girl several times and thought, "It seems as if I have just pulled out the nails from a crate and lifted her out," for she had scratches on her body like packing marks on books and crockery. When Randhir had unknotted the cord of her tight fitting brassiere, he had felt the ribbing on the soft flesh of her back and bosom, and the creased imprint left round her waist by the cord of her shalwar. A heavy and sharp edged gold necklace, set with jewels, had bruised her breast as if it had been scratched wildly with nails.

It was the same season of the monsoons.

Countless rain drops were falling again on the soft delicate pepal leaves. Randhir heard the familiar patter throughout the night. It was a pleasant season. A cool breeze was blowing, but it carried with it the scent of henna. For a long time Randhir's hands stroked the girl's bosom, white as fresh milk. They brushed her breasts gently, like the caress of the breeze. His fingers roving over her soft milky body felt racing tremors and stirred suppressed passions. When he pressed his breast to the girl's bosom every pore of his body heard the twanging of the girl's strummed emotions ... but where was that note, that call of the Ghatan girl's odour, which had been more compelling than the

cry of a suckling baby, that cry which had gone beyond the limits of sound and for him, somehow, had become a nameless perfume.

Randhir was looking out through the bars of the window. Close by the pepal leaves were rustling, but he was trying to look beyond, far beyond them, at the luminous grey clouds. They had a strange glow like the one that had lurked in the Ghatan girl's breasts, a glow that was hidden like a secret object but yet was discernible.

By his side lay a girl whose body was as white as flour kneaded with milk and ghee. Her sleeping body gave off the perfume of henna, which had now grown faint. Randhir felt a sudden aversion for this dying perfume. It had a peculiar tang, like the taste of the mouth after belching...unsavory and insipid.

Randhir looked at the girl by his side. He found her skin covering her body like whitish curdled grains of sour milk floating without life in a colourless liquid. His senses were permeated with the odour which had exhaled effortlessly from the body of the Ghatan girl. It was an odour lighter but more penetrating than the attar of henna, reaching the olfactory organs without even the intake of the breath.

Randhir rallied and again stroked the milky body of the girl. His hand countered numbness; there was no responsive tremor. His new bride, the daughter of a magistrate, a graduate, the heart throb of the boys of her college, had failed to kindle his masculine interest. In the dying perfume of henna attar, he continued to grope for the odour of the Ghatan girl, the odour he had inhaled from her unwashed body in these very days of the monsoons, when the pepal leaves had bathed in the rain.

sakina

THE special train carrying refugees left Amritsar at two o'clock in the afternoon and arrived eight hours late at Mughalpura, well beyond the new international border. During this journey of less than thirty miles, many of the passengers were killed in the frequent attacks on the train; several others were injured. Some had slipped away from the train during the attacks; they were missing.

At ten o'clock on the following morning, Sirajuddin woke up to find himself lying on the cold damp ground of the refugee camp. He felt numb, physically and mentally. All around him he saw an agitated sea of humanity men, women and children and he found his senses grow duller. He wanted to think and recollect, but his memory faded away. For a long time he looked at the grayish sky, his eyes fixed and unmoving. The whole camp was in an uproar, but the old and feeble Sirajuddin heard nothing, as if he were deaf. He appeared to be deep in thought, lost to the world, but actually, that was not so; he was aware of all that was around him, but was too weak to take any interest.

His eyes began slowly to rove across the grey sky, until he found himself staring directly into the sun. Its bright rays not only brought life to his eyes, but suffused his entire body with a warmth that quickened his senses. Images began to form on the screen of his mind rioting, looting, fire, running, the railway station, gun fire, the dark night and ... and Sakina. At once Sirajuddin rose to his feet and like a madman rushed into the masses of people around him.

For three hours, he combed the congested camp, shouting "Sakina... Sakina" but he found no trace of his young daughter, his only child. The whole camp was in a complete chaos; some were looking for their children, others for their mothers, wives or daughters. At last, Sirajuddin sat down, defeated and dejected,

and tried hard, very hard, to remember when and where he had got separated from his daughter, but the vision of his murdered wife... her belly ripped open... would blot out everything else from his mind and he could think no further.

Sakina's mother was dead; she had breathed her last before his very eyes, but where was Sakina, about whom his wife had said, with the death rattle in her throat, "Don't worry about me now, leave me here... take Sakina and run away."

Both had started running together, bare-footed. Sakina's *duppatta* had fallen on the road, and as he had stopped to pick it up, she had shouted, "Abaji, leave it..." He had picked it up all the same... He now felt his bulging coat pocket and drew out some cloth. it was Sakina's *dupatta,* but where was she?

Sirajuddin exerted all the pressure he could on his tired mind, but he could not find the answer. Had he brought Sakina up to the railway station with him? Had he managed to get her on the train with him? On the way the train had been stopped and attacked; had Sakina been carried away by the attackers while he was in a swoon?

He was full of questions, but there were no answers. He wanted to be consoled and encouraged, but who could do that? The thousands around him also needed the same thing. Sirajuddin wanted to cry but his eyes gave him no help; he wondered what had happened to his tear ducts... they were dry.

After six days, when he had partly recovered his wits, he met some people who were prepared to help him. They were a party of eight youngmen, who had guns and a lorry. Sirajuddin blessed them a thousand times and gave them Sakina's description. "She's fair...and very pretty...not the least like me...she took after her mother. She's about seventeen... big eyes black hair and a big mole on her right cheek... she's my only daughter, my only child...Go find her, may God bless you all!"

The volunteers were full of confidence. They assured Sirajuddin that if his daughter was alive they would find her within a few days and restore her to him.

These eight youngmen tried their best. At the risk of their lives they drove to Amritsar and evacuated a large number of men,

women and children. They worked for ten days but found no trace of Sakina.

One day, while on the same mission they saw a girl near Cheherta on the Amritsar road. At the sound of the truck she tried to run away. The volunteers stopped their truck and chased her. After crossing a couple of fields they managed to catch up with her. She was very pretty, and there was a mole on her right Cheek. One of the volunteers said to her, "Don't be afraid..is your name Sakina?

The girls wan face turned paler, but she did not utter a word the volunteers told her not to be afraid and established their bonafides. She then admitted that she was Sirajuddin's daughter, Sakina.

The eight youngmen were very hospitable and they showed every consideration for Sakina. They gave her food and milk, made her comfortable in the truck and then resumed their journey. One of them took off his coat and handed it to Sakina, who was feeling embarrassed without her *dupatta* and was trying all the time to cover her bosom with her arms.

Several days went by, but Sirajuddin was still without news of Sakina. He went from camp to camp, from office to office, but got no clue to the whereabouts of his daughter. During the nights he prayed long and fervently for the success of those young volunteers who had promised to find his daughter, wherever she might be, if she was alive.

One day, Sirajuddin saw the volunteers in their truck, in one of the refugee camps. He ran up to them, just as the truck was moving away, and asked, "My sons, have you any news of my Sakina?"

All of them replied, with one voice, "Don't worry old man we'll trace her." The truck moved away.

Sirajuddin again prayed for the success of these youngmen and felt more hopeful than ever before.

That evening there was some disturbance in the camp, near the spot where Sirajuddin was resting. Four men were carrying something away. He asked what had happened and was told that

a girl had been found lying unconscious near the rail tracks. She was being taken to the camp hospital. Sirajuddin followed the party, which dispersed after handing over the girl to the hospital attendant.

For some time Sirajuddin stood outside the hospital, leaning against a wooden lamp post. Then slowly he moved into the hospital. There was no one in the room, except a stretcher on which lay a body, inert as a corpse. Almost on the tips of his toes Sirajuddin advanced towards the stretcher. Suddenly, someone switched on the light and Sirajuddin, who saw the black mole on the pallid cheeks of the lifeless girl on the stretcher, shrieked, "Sakina...Sakina."

The doctor, who had switched on the light, asked "What's the matter?"

All that Sirajuddin could stammer in reply was, "I'm ... I'm her father".

The doctor went up to the stretcher and felt the girls pulse. He looked at Sirajuddin and nodded his head towards the window. "Open it," he said.

It was the girl on the stretcher who stirred. Her hands moved. Slowly she opened the knot of her shalwar and pushed the garment down her thighs...

Old Sirajuddin's face lit up with joy. "She's alive..." he shouted, "My daughter's alive ...

The doctor began to drip with sweat.

thaila the pimp

THE year, my friend, was 1919, when the people were agitating against the infamous Rowlatt Act. The unrest was spread all over the Punjab, but my story concerns Amritsar. Under the defence of India Rules, Sir Michael O' Dwyer had banned Gandhiji's entry into the Punjab. When Gandhiji tried to defy the ban, he was arrested near Palwal and sent back to Bombay. This was a mistake; at least that's my opinion.

My friend, if the British had not taken this action, I'm certain that the black record of their imperialistic rule would have been without its darkest chapter... the massacre at Jallianwallah Bagh.

Gandhiji was held in high esteem by all, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. He was acknowledged as the Mahatma. When the news of his arrest was received in Lahore all shops were closed and there was a general strike in the city. The news soon travelled to Amritsar and there, too, a hartal was called and all work suspended at once.

It was not generally known that the orders to extern Dr. Kitchlew and Dr Satyapal were received by the Deputy Commissioner on the evening of the 9th of April. He did not want to serve the orders on the two leaders at once. His view was that in Amritsar there was no danger of a breach of peace; the people would hold protest meetings in their usual passive manner and would not resort to violence. I was in Amritsar myself that day. It was Ramnaumi. .. and I saw the procession that was taken out. Not a single order or law was disobeyed, but Sir Michael was obstinate. My friend, he paid no heed to the advice of the Deputy Commissioner. He was obsessed with just one fear; that at a signal from Mahatma Gandhi, these leaders might try to overthrow the British... for him the strikes, public meetings and other forms of protest were nothing but symptoms of a conspiracy against the British regime.

The news of the banishment of Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal spread through the city like wildfire. There was tension in the air an expectancy, and apprehension that something dreadful was about to happen; what it was going to be, no one could say. Outwardly, the city was quiet, as quiet as a graveyard, but beneath this calm was the silent anger of the people, spreading out like lava. When the bazars buzzed with the news of the leaders' externment, the people gathered in thousands and decided to go to the Deputy Commissioner to lodge a protest against the banishment of Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal and to present a petition asking for the withdrawal of the orders. But, my friend , those were not the times when petitions received any attention. With a tyrant like Sir Michael as the chief of the administration, it was not at all surprising that he not only refused to receive any petitions; he declared the procession an unlawful gathering.

Amritsar... that Amritsar which was once the centre of our struggle for freedom, were hundreds were mown down by British machine gunners in Jallianwallah Bagh... What is it like now? But, let's forget about recent event; their memory lies heavy on my heart. for all that happened there on the eve of Partition, some people put the blame on the British, but , my friend, I cannot help seeing the blood on our own hands... but that's another matter...

The Deputy Commissioner's house was in the Civil Lines. This was an area detached from the city and all the officials and the toadies of the British lived there. If you have ever been to Amritsar, you'll recall that the only road linking the city with the Civil Lines passed over the Railway Bridge. From the Bridge to the Civil Lines the road was called the Mall and what a paradise it was, but the residential area on either side of it was meant exclusively for the district officers and the toadies.

When the procession reached Hall Gate, it found the Bridge guarded by mounted British troops... they were posted on the Bridge itself. The procession did not change its course; it moved towards the Bridge. I was one of the crowd, but, my friend, I cannot describe to you the temper of the processionists ... words fail me... Emotion was at its highest pitch , but not one person in the procession was armed, not even with a walking stick. The

people had joined the procession only to lodge a mass protest against their leaders' arrest and to present a petition for their release. Slowly, the procession edged its way towards the Bridge. When it was within the range of British guns, the tommies opened fire... and, suddenly, there was a stampede. It seemed strange that a few soldiers... they were not more than twenty or thirty... should cause confusion in a mob of thousands of persons... but, my friend, bullets are terrible things and the sound of gunfire, particularly when the muzzles stare you in the face, is a terrifying experience. The mob scattered; some were wounded by bullets, others were trampled under foot.

On the right side was an open sewage drain. When the firing began I was at the mercy of the panic stricken, though I was as much part of the stampede as any one else. The firing stopped and I found myself in the sewer. How I had fallen or dived into it, I do not know. I climbed out and found that the crowd had dispersed. The wounded lay writhing on the road, and behind their guns, the tommies were laughing. My friend, I do not know in what frame of mind I was, but I could not have been in full possession of my senses. When I fell into the drain I was absolutely out of my mind with fear, but when I climbed out, I slowly began to realise what had happened.

Not far away I could hear some commotion, as if some people were shouting and shrieking with anger. From the drain I crossed over to the shrine of Pir Zahira and reached Hall Gate. There I found thirty or forty excited young men gathering stones and throwing them at the big clock crowning Hall Gate. They soon smashed its dial and as the china fragments crashed onto the road, some of them began shouting.

'Let's smash the Queen's statue.'

'No, let's set the Town Hall on fire.

.... And all the banks.

'Stop, what good will that do ? Let's go to the Bridge and wipe out the tommies.'

I recognised the young man who had spoken last. He was Thaila the Pimp. His real name was Muhammad Tufail, but everyone called him Thaila the Pimp. He was'nt really a pimp, but he

lived in Prostitutes' Bazar... my friend, in Amritsar we had no other name for the red lantern area... we called a spade a spade. Thaila the Pimp was a rich prostitute's son and did not have to tout for any girls for money. He had enough money to burn and not surprisingly, therefore, was completely debauced. He took to wine, women and cards at a very tender age and for such unprofessional conduct no one liked him in Prostitutes' Bazar, not even his sisters who were the pride of the profession. Their names were Shamshad and Almas and they were as pretty as girls can be. Shamshad was also a very talented singer and rich patrons came from all over the country to be charmed by her marvellous voice. But I was talking about Thaila. According to the Bazar rumour the sisters had decided that they would no longer tolerate his escapades and extravagance and had disowned him... but in spite of that he still managed to touch them for money whenever he was short. He never touted for them or anyone else, but outside Prostitutes' Bazar people called him Thaila the Pimp. He was always dressed well and lived well. His taste was good, he was witty and full of jokes, but they were never ribald or bawdy like those of the *Mirasis* or *Bhands*, who are our professional entertainers. He was tall, well built and quite handsome.

The excited young men paid him no attention and made off for the Queen's statue. He tried once more, `Do not waste your energies,' he cried, `Let's go for the tommies, the murderers of our innocent countrymen. By God! I am certain that if we make a concerted and determined effort we can wring the necks of these foreigners ... Come, follow me.'

Some had left even while he was making his appeal. Others stayed with him and followed him when he began striding towards the bridge. I saw all this from my position near the fountain. What Thaila was trying to do was sheer suicide. I shouted to him, `Don't go, friend... why are you courting death for yourself and others?

Thaila heard me, laughed with a strange twist of his mouth and said, `Thaila is going forward only to prove that he is not afraid of bullets' Turning to his companions, he added, `If any of you is afraid, he need not come with me.'

In such a situation it is difficult to retrace one's steps; especially when the leader himself is prepared for the supreme sacrifice. Thaila strode towards the Bridge at a quicker pace and his companions too walked faster to keep up with him.

The Bridge is not far from Hall Gate : not more than sixty or seventy yards. Thaila stayed at the head of the brave little group. About twenty steps from where the railing of the Bridge began, were two mounted tommies. They watched the advance of these unarmed men, shouting slogans and working themselves into a frenzy. When Thaila reached the railings, I heard a shot. I thought that would be the last of Thaila, but he continued to advance. His little band of followers had dispersed at the first shot. He turned round and shouted, `Don't run away ...come on, let's go for them!'

As he urged his running companions to rally round him, he was facing the fountain, where I stood. Another shot rang out and Thaila jerked forward, but he did not fall. He at once wheeled round towards the tommies, groping with one hand for the wound in his back. My friend, I was at quite a distance, but I could see a red stain on his white silk shirt. Thaila sprang forward... he was like a wounded tiger. Another shot was fired at him... he was hit and for a moment he tottered, but in a flash he had leapt at one of the tommies. It all happened so quickly... one moment there was a soldier on the horse and, suddenly, the saddle was empty. In a twinkling of the eye, Thaila was on top of the tommy, now struggling on the ground.... The other tommy tried to control his frightened steed, and completely unnerved, began firing wildly... I don't know what happened after that for I swooned away.

My friend, when I regained consciousness I found myself at home. Someone had identified me and had carried me home. From him I learnt that Thaila's companions, after scattering before a hail of bullets from the Bridge, had joined the mob trying to smash the Queen's statue. The Town Hall and three banks had been set on fire, about half a dozen Europeans had been killed and there had been widespread looting.

The British were not much concerned about the looting, but they had sworn to avenge the blood of their countrymen. It was this

that led to the massacre at Jallianwalah Bagh. The Deputy Commissioner had handed over the city to General Dyer. On the twelfth of April, the General marched his troops through several bazars and arrested dozens of innocent persons. The next day there was a public meeting at Jallianwallah Bagh and about fifty thousand persons gathered there. Towards the evening General Dyer appeared on the scene with British and Sikh troops and opened fire, mowing down the unarmed persons.

At that time no one could accurately estimate the casualties, but, later on, an investigation was made and it was announced that about a thousand were killed and three or four thousand persons were injured.... But, friend, we were talking about Thaila. I've already told you all that I myself saw. No one is perfect except the One and Only ... God; Thaila was far from perfect. He had tasted all the forbidden fruits. He was a prostitute's son and he lived in the brothels....But I am again straying. The Bridge... I am certain that the first shot fired at him had hit him in the chest, but he seemed hardly to have felt the impact of the searing lead. He had turned round to urge his companions not to run away. While he was doing this another bullet hit him in the back and he was shot again in the chest when he went for the tommy. I learnt later that Thaila's fingers were so deeply clawed into the throat of the Britisher, who had already gone to Hell, that it required considerable effort to separate the two bodies.

The next day, Thaila's body was handed over to his relatives for burial. The body had been riddled through with bullets; the other tommy had emptied his revolver into Thaila's corpse...I say corpse because I'm certain his soul must have flown from his body before the second tommy had calmed his horse and aimed his revolver at Thaila.

Those who were present when Taila's body was carried into Prostitutes' Bazar say the scene was unforgettable. He was not liked by his relatives, some of them even shunned him, but when they saw his mangled corpse, they beat their breasts and their lamentations and cries filled the air. His sisters, Shamshad and Almas, fainted away. When the bier was lifted, for the last journey, the sisters were in a terrible state; their cries were heart rending and all those who heard them shed tears...tears of blood, quite unashamedly.

My friend, I read somewhere that when the French Revolution broke out the first bullet struck a prostitute. Thaila the Pimp was not a pimp but he was a prostitute's son...and his sisters were in the profession. I do not know what bullet killed him the tenth or the fiftieth fired that day. No one bothered about such details, perhaps, because Thaila was not acknowledged in any society. I doubt if his name appears in the list of people killed during the Punjab Bloodbath...that is, if any such list was prepared.

A state of emergency had been declared. The civil authorities had handed over the administration to the army. That demon, known as Martial Law, stalked the town, belching the bazars and the bye-lanes. Under these conditions, Thaila was buried hurriedly, almost furtively,...without much ceremony...as if his very death was a crime committed by his own bereaved family, all traces of which had to be erased or hidden away in great haste.

That, my friend, was how Thaila...Thaila the Pimp died and was buried and...and...."

My fellow traveller paused for the first time since he had begun his story. There was complete silence. The train thundered on and I felt as if the rattling of the wheels was nothing but a metallic drumbeat signalling. "Thaila was dead....Thaila was buried...Thaila was dead...Thaila was buried." There was no time lag between the death and the burial, as if he had died one moment and was buried the next. The wheels clattered on and in my mind I heard these words repeated with the same maddening speed. It had an overpowering effect on me.

To break the trance, into which I found myself slipping, I spoke to my fellow traveller.

"You were about to say something else."

He gave a start and turning to me said. "Yes, my friend, I've yet to add a painful chapter to my story.

"I've already told you that Thaila had two sisters. Shamshad and Almas...both very pretty. Shamshad was tall, with delicate features and lovely limpid eyes. She sang the *thumri* very well. I've heard she took lessons from Khan Sahib Fateh Ali Khan. Almas was not a good singer, but she was a matchless dancer.

When she performed she sang with every part of her body, each gesture and movement of her's was a poem, and her eyes...they had such magnetism, such magic! She had to be seen to be believed..."

My fellow traveller dwelt at length, more than I thought was necessary, in praising the sisters, their beauty and accomplishments. I did not interrupt him, for that did not seem proper. After some time he came out of this cycle and again took up the thread of the story.

"The story now, friend, is this; some bootlickers of the British told the army officers about the beauty of these sisters and about their talents. During the rioting an English woman had been killed...her name was Miss Sherwood. The British army officers decided to send for the sisters...and...and...avenge the death of their country woman...you understand, my friend, what I mean?"

Yes I do," I said.

My fellow traveller heaved a deep sigh. "In times like those there should be no social distinctions between respectable women and dancing girls, but, my friend, I think this country and its people have no conception of what is respect and honour. When the police *thanedar* of the area received the orders he set about executing them himself. He went to the house of Almas and Shamshad and said that the sahibs had commanded their presence... they wanted to see them perform. The sods in Thaila's grave were still fresh for he had become one of God's own only two days before the sisters received the summons to sing and dance before those whose bullets...My friend, I cannot think of any other, act of vengeance that was more cruel and sadistic. Did not those power drunk officers, who issued the orders think of Almas and Shamshad as human beings, as women who had their feelings and honour even though they were prostitutes? Why can't such women have self respect, why not?

Although he was looking at me, my companion seemed to be talking to himself.

"Certainly, they can," I said.

colonizers as female abusers

"Yes, my friend, after all Thaila was their brother and he had not given his life for a gambler's trifle in some brawl in a pub or a brothel, nor had he died in a drunkard's escapade. He had gripped the cup of martyrdom firmly by the stem and slowly and deliberately he had drained it empty, with the dregs, in the cause of his country. He was a prostitute's son but that prostitute was a woman, a mother...and Almas and Shamshad were his sisters...and they were sisters first and prostitutes afterwards. When they saw Thaila's corpse they had swooned away and when his bier was lifted their wails and lamentations had moved the stone hearted to shed tears of blood..."

"Did they go?" I asked.

My companion did not reply for some time; then in a voice full of sorrow, he said, "Yes...yes, they went...properly and brightly dressed for the occasion...they had no choice...." Suddenly, his voice was bitter instead of being sad. "They went...after tinting their cheeks, pencilling their eyebrows, painting their lips and dressing their hair. They went in their best costumes, sprayed all over with scent. I've heard that their performance was a great success...both sisters were at their best...in their flesh tight trousers and gossamer garments they were like fairies floating down from Koh Kaf...wine flowed freely and the sisters sang and danced...and time went by unnoticed. The British seemed to have forgotten about the death of their country woman...But two hours after midnight their senior officer gave a signal and the merry making came to an end."

My fellow traveller rose and walked up to the window and looked at the trees rushing past. The train rumbled on and the heavy metallic beat of the wheels on the rails seemed to be repeating, "Party ended...party ended...party ended."

I tore this sound away from my ears and asked, "What happened, then?"

"The sisters tore their flimsy garments to shred and stood before their tormentors stark naked, shouting, "Here, take a look at us. We are Thaila's sisters...sisters of that martyr, whose beautiful body you riddled with your bullets...the body that housed his freedom loving soul. We are his beautiful sisters...come and defile our scented bodies with your evil smelling passion, but

before you do that, all we want is an opportunity to spit in your face."

After this he became silent as if he would not speak again. I at once asked, "What happened, then?"

His eyes were full of tears. "They...they were shot dead."

I did not say anything. The train slowed down as it entered a station and stopped. My fellow traveller called in a coolie and had his bags carried out of the compartment. When he was about to leave, I asked, "Was that the end? Somehow I feel you've made it up yourself."

"How did you guess that?" he asked, surprised.

"There was something in your manner...something I can't explain that made me suspect that you had not told me the truth."

Trying to control his bitterness, my fellow traveller said, "Yes, those shameless bitches." He paused and then added, "They disgraced their brother and his martyrdom."

And he stepped out of the compartment and walked away quickly....

revision of the role of women

beauty in service of the colonizer is treachery

khushia

KHUSHIA was deep in thought.

After buying a *paan,* he sat on a wooden platform, jutting out from the shop next to the paanwalah's stall. All day, this platform was littered with motor-tyres and other auto spares but when the establishment closed at about half-past eight in the evening, these goods were pushed into the shop. Shortly afterwards, Khushia would station himself on the empty platform.

Khushia chewed the*paan* and the black tobacco in it, slowly and with deliberation. Their mixed juice filled his mouth, flushing the crevices between his teeth. He felt as if he were grinding his thoughts into powder and dissolving them in the thick spittle in the mouth. Perhaps, it was this feeling which prevented him from spitting out the pungent liquid.

Khushia kept on accumulating the spittle in his mouth and pondering over something that had happened to him less than half an hour ago.

Before coming to the Platform as usual, he had gone to Fifth Lane in Khetwade. That new girl from Mangalore, Kanta, who had joined his circuit recently, lived at the corner of the lane. Khushia had heard from someone that she was shifting and had gone to confirm his information.

He knocked at the door. A voice from well within the house enquired.

"Who's there?"

"It's Khushia."

After a while the door opened and Khushia entered. When the door closed behind him, he turned round. He blinked his eyes unbelievingly; he was astounded, for Kanta was completely

naked. She did have a small towel round herself, but that could hardly be called a covering, for all that was there to hide, was in full view before his amazed eyes. "Hello, Khushia, what brings you here so early? I was just about to have a bath... Sit down somewhere...You should have asked the *baharwala* to send in some tea... You know, that damned Ramu has run away."

Khushia who had never seen any woman so unceremoniously naked, felt very nervous. He did not know what to say. His eyes, abashed at being confronted suddenly with Kanta's nakedness, sought to turn aside. In his confusion he managed to say, "Go, carry on with your bath." And finding his tongue working, he continued, "...Since you weren't dressed, you needn't have opened the door. You could have told me you were bathing. I would have called later. Well, any way go and have your bath now."

Kanta smiled. "When you said, "It's Khushia," I thought, what's the harm?... It's only Khushia; I'll let him in."

This smile of Kanta was still agitating Khushia's mind. He felt as if Kanta's nude body was before him even now, standing erect like a candle and melting into his body.

Her body was beautiful. For the first time Khushia realised that even those who hired out their bodies could retain attractive figures. He was surprised at this, but he was even more surprised at her appearing before him naked and unashamed.

Why?

He remembered her reply, "When you said, `It's Khushia, `I thought, what's the harm? It's only Khushia; I'll let him in."

Kanta and Khushia were in the same profession; he a pimp and she, one of the many girls for whom he touted. This did give Kanta the right to refer to him as "only Khushia;" but it did not mean that she could appear before him completely naked and be unafraid and normal. There must be something else. Khushia began to read a disconcerting meaning in Kanta's reply. His interpretation was so evident and yet so obscure that he could come to no definite conclusion.

is this emasculating?

Even now he saw the vision of Kanta's nude body, its skin stretched taut as a drum head. She had been insensitive to his unsteady gaze. Even in his confusion, he had managed to focus his probing eyes on her brown figure, there had been no reaction. She had stood mute like a copper statue, devoid of any feeling.

".... Damn it, there was a man standing before her... a full grown man, whose eyes could penetrate even the clothes of a woman and only Paramatma knew what lengths his thoughts could go ! But, no, she hadn't turned a hair.... And her eyes? They seemed to have come fresh from the laundry, without a speck of shame or modesty in them. She ought to have felt a little disturbed, a light blush ought to have been tinted her eyes. She was a prostitute, of course, but even they didn't behave like this."

He had been a pimp for ten years and knew all about the weaknesses and idiosyncracies of the girls in his profession. That girl who lived at the end of Pydhonie, with a man she called brother, was very fond of the songs of the film "Achut Kanya" because she was very much in love with Ashok Kumar, the star of the film. Many enterprising youngmen, knowing about her infatuation, had posed as Ashok Kumar's friends, and holding out the hope of introducing her to him, had exploited her. There was also that Punjabi girl in Dadar who wore slacks because one of her lovers had said to her that her legs were like those of that Hollywood actress, whose crural charms were featured in "Morocco". She had seen this film many times and when she learnt that its star, Marlene Dietrich, whose legs were insured for two hundred thousand rupees, wore slacks she immediately had some made and wore them tight at the hips. Khushia also knew that the Marathi girl at Mazgaon, seduced handsome college students because she wanted to become the mother of a pretty child; though she knew that she would never be able to fulfil this desire, for she was barren. About that black girl from Madras. Who wore large diamond earrings, Khushia regretted that she spent so much money on creams claiming to bleach her skin. He knew all the girls in his circuit very well, but he had never imagined that the new girl Kanta Kumari whose real name he could not pronounce, would one day appear before him completely naked and create a crisis in his life.

So much spittle had accumulated in his mouth that it prevented him from chewing the tiny pieces of betel nut; they would float away in the liquid, every time he manoeuvred them under his teeth. His narrow forehead was covered with beads of perspiration, like drops of moisture on a piece of muslin in which some fresh cheese is being squeezed. His masculine pride had been hurt and whenever he recalled the vision of Kanta's nude body, he felt as if he had been insulted.

"If this isn't an insult, what else is it?.... A girl appears naked before a man and says, `what's the harm?...It's only Khushia ... Khushia?... he couldn't be a man, but a tom cat, like the one that is always yawning on Kanta's bed..., yes, what else"?

Khushia began to feel convinced that he had been insulted. He was a man and expected every woman, good or bad, to feel that natural modesty in his presence which has always existed between man and woman. He had gone to Kanta's place only to enquire if she was shifting; it was not a business call. And, if Khushia had to imagine what Kanta would be doing when he knocked at her door, he could not have thought of anything beyond the following.

She would be in bed with her hair fixed in curlers, or cleaning her armpits with that depilatory powder, the smell of which almost turned Khushia's stomach...she would be in bed, patience playing with cards.

She did not keep anyone in the house so he could not have thought of any other situation. But, Khushia had never bothered to think of what she might be doing. He had only wanted to confirm his information. And Kanta, whom he usually saw in gaudy dresses, had suddenly come out and stood before him completely naked; for the little towel had covered nothing that should have been hidden. Khushia felt as if a peeled banana had slipped out of his hand and stood before him in the shape of Kanta. No, he felt as if he himself had become naked! If this incident had closed after Khushia had seen Kanta naked, he could have forgotten the whole affair; it might even have left a pleasant memory. But the thought which rankled in his mind was that the girl had smiled and said, "When you said, `It's

Khushia , " I thought what's the harm? It's only Khushia ... I'll let him in."

These words were gnawing at his pride.

"Sali... she smiled," he would mutter again and again: Her smile appeared to him as naked as the body she had shown him. Khushia dug back into the memories of his childhood, when a woman in the neighbourhood would ask him, "Khushia my son, run and get me a bucket of water." On his return, she would say, from behind an improvised *dhoti*-screen, Come in and place the water by my side. I have soaped myself and can't see a thing." he would lift the *dhoti*-screen and place the water by her side. He would see a naked woman under a layer of soap-suds; but the sight had never stirred the emotions that were troubling him now.

" I was a child then, absolutely innocent. There is a great difference between a boy and a man. No woman ever hides herself from a mere boy. But now I am a full-grown man of twenty-eight and not even an old woman would stand undressed before a man of my age!"

What had Kanta taken him for? Had he not all those faculties which all normal young men possess? Of course, there was no denying that he had become confused momentarily at seeing Kanta without any clothes, all of a sudden. But did he not survey all her nude charms which in spite of frequent rough handling, still retained their firmness? Had he not decided that the possession of Kanta for ten rupees was not all a bad bargain? Had he not at once thought of that clerk who, being unable to obtain a concession of two rupees from Kanta, had gone away without touching her, and considered him an unlucky fool? And above all, had not the sight caused a sudden tension in his body and a straining of his muscles? Why had this brown girl from Mangalore not considered him a man, and "only Khushia" as she had said, and shown everything to him?

In anger Khushia squirted out the thick *paàn* spittle on to the pavement, spattering it in an irregular pattern. He got up and took a tram home.

He had a bath and putting on a new dhoti, went down to the hair-cutting saloon in the block in which he lived. While combing his hair before the mirror, he suddenly seemed to decide upon something and sitting down, composed himself and asked the barber for a shave. The barber was surprised.

"Khushia bhai, have you forgotten? I shaved you only this morning?"

At this, Khushia passed the back of his hand under his chin and said, "It wasn't close enough."

After the shave, he had his faced massaged. He left the barber's saloon and walked towards the taxi-stand. He signalled and a taxi came out of the queue. When Khushia had seated himself, the driver asked, "Where, sahib?".

These two words, especially sahib, pleased Khushia. He smiled expansively and said in very friendly tone, "I'll tell you later, first get along towards Opera House, by the Lamington Road route - understand?"

The driver flagged his meter and drove the taxi towards Lamington Road. When the taxi had reached almost the end of the road, Khushia instructed, "Turn to the left".

The taxi turned to the left, and before the driver had changed into top gear, Khushia said, "Stop near this lamp-post for a minute." The car stopped dead against the lamp-post. Khushia opened the door and went towards the *paanwallah's* stall opposite. He bought a *paan* and after a few words with a man standing nearby, brought him along with him into the taxi and said to the driver, "Go straight on?"

The taxi, under Khushia's direction, passed through several streets, glittering with bright lights.

Finally, it turned into a dimly lit lane. Several people were on the pavement preparing for their night's rest. Some were getting themselves an oil massage. The taxi moved on till it reached a wooden house, built on the pattern of a bungalow. Khushia had the car stopped and turning to the man he had brought with him from the stall said, "You go, I'll wait here."

The man, gaping foolishly at Khushia, went out of the car slowly, walked uncertainly across the lane and entered the house pointed out to him by Khushia.

Khushia remained in his seat. Crossing his legs, he pulled out a *beedi,* lit it, and after one or two puffs threw it out, on to the road. He was very restless. Something fluttered in his breast and he felt as if the taxi's engine was still running; probably the driver had left it on purposely, to extract more fare from him.

He leaned forward, "How much will you add to the fare by keeping the engine running?" He enquired sarcastically. The driver turned around and with an injured look on his face said, "Seth, the engine is not running?"

Khushia realised his mistake and felt even more nervous. He began to bite his lips. With a quick movement, he put on his Gandhi cap which until then, he had kept under his arm. He stretched out his hand and tapped the driver on his shoulder. "Look,, I am expecting a girl -- as she enters the car, race off... understand?... Don't be afraid, there won't be any trouble."

Two figures emerged from the wooden house opposite. Khushia's friend was walking in front and Kanta, wrapped in a brightly coloured saree, behind him. Khushia slid across the seat to the darker side. His friend opened the door and helped Kanta inside.

"Khushia -- you?" she almost shrieked.

"Yes, it's Khushia, ... but you have got your money hav'nt you?" His thick voice rose, "Driver, on to Juhu?"

The driver pressed the starter, the engine spluttered into life and whatever Kanta said was drowned in the metallic roar of the engine. The taxi shot forward, leaving Khushia's friend in the middle of the road, as bewildered as ever.

Khushia was never again seen on the wooden platform of the automobile spare-parts shop.

sharda

NAZIR wanted to buy a bottle of whisky and was making a round of the black market. He was looking for Scotch, which he had always found, under the counter, at a cigarette stall near the General Post Office, not far from the dockyard. At the stall he handed over thirty five rupees and received the bottle, wrapped in paper. The time was 11 a.m. Nazir usually had drinks after sunset, but the day was so pleasant that he wanted to begin right away and continue far into the night.

With the bottle under his arm, he started eagerly on his way back home, full of elation and good cheer. He planned to engage a taxi from the Bore Bunder stand, take a nip and reach home slightly tipsy. If his wife objected, he would be light hearted and say, "Look, how fine the weather is?" and would quote that clumsy couplet about angels being kept away by the clouds and recording all sins as good deeds. She would nag him for some time and then reconcile herself to the situation, and at his request start preparations to fry him some mince-meat *prathas*.

He had hardly gone about twenty yards from the stall when someone salamed him. Nazir had a poor memory for faces and could not place the person who had greeted him, but pretending otherwise, he responded with a polite hello and added, "Where have you been? Its been ages since we met."

The man smiled and said, "Well Sir, its you, who kept away. I have been expecting you..."

Nazir still could not place him, "Well, here I am now!"

"Then come along with me."

"Let's go," said Nazir, in keeping with his gay and care free mood.

The man saw the bottle in Nazir's hand, and forcing a smile, said, "You seem to be equipped with everything else."

At this , Nazir at once concluded that the man was a pimp.

"Your name..."

"Karim.. had you forgotten it?"

Nazir remembered that before his marriage, a Karim used to procure nice girls for him. He was a very good pimp. He looked at him intently and felt that the face was familiar. Then, suddenly from the hazy past it emerged and took shape in his reminiscent mind. He apologised to Karim, "I am sorry, friend, I didn't recognise you. I think its some years since we met."

"Yes sir , its been quite some time."

"Your beat used to be the corner of Grant Road."

Karim lit his *beedi* and with great pride, said, "I have given that up. Thanks to your good wishes, I am now established in a hotel."

Nazir complimented him and said, "You have done very well."

Karim said, in an even more boastful tone, " There are ten girls... one of them is absolutely new..."

To tease him, Nazir said, "You fellows always say so!"

Karim did not like the dig at his profession. "By the Holy Quran, I have never lied. May I eat pig's meat, if that girl is not new!" He then lowered his voice and whispered into Nazir's ear, "She had her first passenger eight days ago. May I go black in the face if I should lie!"

Nazir asked, "Was she a virgin?

"Yes sir... that passenger had to pay two hundred rupees."

Nazir's elbow prodded karim in the ribs, "I see, you're trying to settle the rate right now?" Karim did not like this remark, "I swear by the Holy Quran ! May he be a swine who bargains with. You ! Come along with me. You can pay what you like. Karim has had a lot of your salt.!"

Nazir had four hundred and fifty rupees with him. The weather was pleasant and so was his mood. His memory took him back six years. Without a drink he felt inebriated. "Come, friend., let it be all fun today... we should arrange for another bottle."

Karim asked, "How much did you pay for this one?"

"Thirty five rupees."

"What brand?"

"Johnny Walker."

Karim folded his hand across his breast and said, "I'll get it for thirty."

Nazir took out three tenners and handed them to Karim.

"Never think twice about doing a good turn ! .... Here take this. After we get there this is the first thing you should do...You know on such occasions I never drink alone."

Karim smiled, "And perhaps you remember that I never take more than a peg and a half."

Nazir recalled that six years back Karim used to take only a peg and a half. Nazir smiled as he remembered this and said, "Have two today."

"No sir, not a drop more than a peg and a half."

Karim stopped near a dingy building, which a dirty little sign board announced was Marina Hotel. The name was pretty but the building was ugly. The staircase was shaky. Near the entrance, Pathan money-lenders in voluminous shalwars, were reclining on cots. Some Christians lived on the ground floor. On the first floor there were a large number of *khalasis*. The second floor was with the proprietor of the hotel and on the third floor, Karim had a corner room. This room was crowded with girls, cooped up like geese in a pen.

Karim sent for a key from the hotel manager. He opened a big but disproportionate room. A bed with iron posts, a chair and a teapoy were its furniture. The room seemed open on three sides, because of several windows, which had cracked and broken glass-panes. The room was very draughty.

Karim dusted the filthy easy chair with an even filthier duster and said to Nazir, "Sit down ...but I must tell you this room will cost ten rupees."

Nazir examined the room more closely and said, "Is't that a bit high?"

Karim said, "Very much so, but what is to be done, that sala, the hotel owner is so grasping. He refuses to reduce even a pie and Nazir sahib, on sprees who worries about bills!"

Nazir considered this and said, "You are right....shall I pay in advance?"

"No, no...you first have a look at the girl," He went away to his room.

He returned shortly afterwards with and extremely shy girl. She seemed to be a homely sort of Hindu girl, draped in a white dhoti. She was about fourteen, not pretty but ingenuous and unaffected.

Karim said to her, "Sit down, this is a friend of mine ... a good friend!"

The girl, her eyes cast down, sat on the bed. Karim went out, saying , "Decide for yourself, Nazir sahib; I'll get the glasses and soda."

Nazir rose from the chair and sat down beside the girl. She shrank back. With the same approach he had employed six years ago, he asked, `What's your name?"

The girl made no reply. Nazir moved nearer to the girl, took her hand, and said. "Madam, what is your name?"

The girl jerked her hand away and said, "Shakuntala."

Nazir thought of the Shakuntala with whom Raja Dushyanta had fallen in love.

"My name is Dushyanta."

Nazir was bent on enjoying himself. The girl smiled when she heard the name assumed by him. Karim returned and showed Nazir four iced soda bottles. "I remember, you always like Roger's Soda. I have got them from the ice-box."

Nazir was delighted. “You’re a wonder!” He then turned to the girl, “Madam, will yu indulge?”

The girl did not say anything. Karim said, "She does not drink. She's been here only eight days."

Nazir was a bit disappointed. "That's bad."

Karim opened the whisky bottle and pouring out a double peg for Nazir, winked at him and said, "You persuade her."

Nazir finished the glass in one draught. Karim took half a peg and immediately his speech was affected. Slightly fuddled, he asked Nazir, "You like the girl don't you?" Nazir gave the matter some thought, but he could not decide whether he liked the girl or not. He looked at Shakuntala closely. Perhaps, he may have liked her if her name had not been Shakuntala. The Shakuntala Raja Dushyanta had seen while on a hunt and immediately fallen in love with, was very beautiful; at least the books said so and compared her with the sun and the moon. Her eyes were not bad. They were not a gazelle's ; they were her own, big and black. He did not give the matter further thought and said, "She 's alright, old fellow... say, what bargain do we strike?"

Karim poured himself a half peg and said, "A hundred. "

Nazir had stopped bothering about bills, "Agreed."

Karim downed his drink, and went away. Nazir bolted the door.

When he sat down beside Shakuntala again, she became nervous. Nazir did not like this. He tried again. Taking her by the arm he pulled her close to him and forced a kiss on her. It was a very unsatisfactory affair, but the effect of the whisky was elating. He had had six pegs so far and was sorry that such a costly drink was being wasted because Shakuntala was so unresponsive, so unfamiliar with the needs of the situation. It was unrewarding like putting a novice through the motions of swimming.

At last he gave up. He rose, opened the door and called for Karim, who was cooped up in his room with his girls.

Karim came running, "What's the matter, Nazir sahib?"

In despair, said, "Nothing, old fellow can't make much of her!"

'Why?"

"She is not at all co-operative."

Karim took Shakuntala aside and gave her a long lecture, but she failed to benefit. Blushing red and adjusting her *dhoti,* she ran out of the room. At this Karim said, "I'll be back in a moment."

Nazir stopped him. "Let her go... bring someone else."

But, he immediately changed his mind. "Get me the bottle for which I gave you the money and ask all the girls, except Shakuntala, to come to my room...I mean those who drink. There will be nothing else today. I'll sit with them, talk with them and do nothing else!"

Karim understood Nazir well. He sent four girls to his room. Nazir looked at them cursorily for he had decided that the programme for the day would be confined to drinking only. He called for glasses for the girls and began to drink with them. He had lunch sent up from the hotel and until six in the evening chatted with the girls on topics that were tabooed in society. Nazir was in good spirits. He had more than made up for the unpromising debut with Shakuntala.

Half a bottle remained which he took home. Fifteen days, later, again because of the weather he wanted to drink all day.

Instead of buying scotch from the cigarette stall he thought he should see Karim who would get him a bottle for thirty rupees. He called at the hotel and found Karim in. On seeing him, Karim said, in a hushed voice, "Nazir sahib, Shakuntala's elder sister is here. She arrived by this morning's train... she's very obstinate, but you'll be able to persuade her."

Nazir did not know what to say. He said to himself, "Let's take a look." To Karim he said, "First you get me whisky." He took thirty rupees from his wallet and handed them to Karim.

Taking the notes, Karim said, "You go to the room, I'll get it."

Nazir had only ten rupees left, but he had the room opened and went in. He thought he would take the bottle of whisky, have a

look at Shakuntala's sister and go away, tipping Karim a couple of rupees.

In the draughty room, open on three sides, Nazir sat down in the filthy chair, lit a cigarette and lifted his legs on to the bed. After some time there was a knock and Karim entered. He came up to Nazir and whispered, "Nazir sahib, but you'll have to tackle her yourself!"

Karim went out. After about five minutes a girl, whose face resembled Shakuntala's except that it wore a frown, entered the room, in a white dhoti drapped in Shakuntala's style. With an indifference bordering on audacity, she raised her hand towards her forehead and greeted him. She sat down on the bed and Nazir felt as if she had come as a belligerent. Adjusting himself, to the situation, after a six year flash back into his life, he asked, "Are you Shakuntala's sister?"

She replied, in a sharp and angry tone, "Yes."

Nazir was quiet for some time. Then he began to scrutinize the girl who seemed to be about three years older than Shakuntala. She resented this very much. Angrily she stamped her foot and said, "What is it that you wish to say to me?"

Nazir smiled, as he used to six years ago, and said, "Madam, why are you so angry?"

She burst out, "Why shouldn't I be angry?... This Karim of your's enticed my sister away from Jaipur. Tell me, shouldn't my blood boil at this? I hear she was also presented to you?"

Nazir had never before faced such a situation. After giving the matter some thought, he said, with all the earnestness he could summon. "The moment I saw Shakuntala, I decided that she wouldn't do for me. She's too raw. I don't like such girls. You might not like my saying it, but it's a fact, I prefer women who understand a man's needs.

She did not say anything. Nazir asked her, "Your name?"

Shakuntala's sister replied briefly, "Sharda."

Nazir again asked her, "Where do you come from?"

"Jaipur. Her tone was still sharp and she was very angry.

Nazir smiled and said, "Look , you've no right to be angry with me... if Karim has offended you, punish him, but I'm innocent."

He stood up and in a sudden move took her in his arms and kissed her on the lips. Before she could say anything, he said. "I'm guilty of this offence and I'm prepared to be punished for it."

The expression on the girl's face underwent many quick changes. She spat on the floor three or four times. Perhaps, she was about to abuse him but she did not say anything. She stood up, but suddenly she sat down again. Nazir wanted her to say something. "Tell me, what is to be my punishment?"

She was about to say something when a baby started crying in Karim's room. The girl rose, but Nazir stopped her, "Where are you going?"

At once she became a mother. "Munni is crying for milk," and she left the room.

What sort of a girl was she? Nazir had not been able to make much of her. He was still thinking about her, when Karim came in with the bottle of whisky and some soda. He poured out a *chota* for Nazir. After finishing his own drink he asked Nazir in a whisper, "Did you have a talk with Sharda?.... I had begun to think that you must have converted her."

Nazir smiled, "She's got a terrible temper."

"Yes sir. She came this morning and has made life miserable for me. You cool her down...Shakuntala came here on her own, because her father had deserted her mother. Sharda's case is also somewhat similar. Her husband disappeared shortly after marriage... God knows where he is?...She and her baby now live with her mother... You persuade her, won't you?"

Nazir asked, "What's all this about my persuading her?"

Karim winked at him, "Sali, she wont listen to me. She's been telling me off ever since she arrived."

Sharda came into the room, carrying her one year old baby. She darted an angry look at Karim, who hastily swallowed his drink and slipped out of the room.

Munni had a bad cold. Her nose ran continously. Nazir called Karim, handed him a five rupee note and said, "Bring some Vicks."

Karim asked, "What's that?"

Nazir explained, "Its for the cold." He wrote out the name of the balm on a scrap of paper and said, "You can get it at any store."

"Yes sir." said Karim and he went away. Nazir turned towards Munni. He loved children. Munni was not pretty, but because of her age, Nazir found her attractive. He put her on his lap. Her mother had not been able to put her to sleep. Nazir ran his fingers slowly over her head and she was soon asleep. He said to Sharda, `I'm her mother,"

Sharda smiled, "Give her to me. I'll put her to bed."

Sharda returned after a few minutes. Her face no longer bore any traces of her previous anger. Nazir sat close to her. He was quiet for some time before asking Sharda, "Would you allow me to be your husband?" And without waiting for an answer, he put his arm around her and held her close to his breast. Sharda did not show any sign of temper. 'Madame, please reply," he insisted.

Sharda did not reply. Nazir got up and took a peg. Sharda wrinkled her nose and said, "I hate this thing".

Nazir poured out another peg and after mixing some soda with it, he came back with the glass and sat down near Sharda.

"You hate this thing. Why?"

Sharda made a brief reply, "I do."

"Well, from today, you'll no longer hate... here" and he offered the drink to Sharda.

"I won't have it !"

"I insist that you have it."

Sharda took the glass and for some time looked at it in a strange manner. She glanced at Nazir helplessly and then holding her nose between her fingers she drained the glass. With an effort she prevented herself from vomitting. With the end of her *dhoti*

she wiped her eyes and said, "this is the first and the last time... But why did I drink it?"

Nazir kissed her moist lips and said, "Don't try to find the answer." He went to the door and bolted it.

He opened the door at seven the evening. Karim came in and Sharda, her eyes avoiding his, slipped out of the room. Karim was very happy. He said to Nazir. "You have done the trick... I won't ask you for a hundred, pay fifty."

Nazir was very satisfied with Sharda, so completely contented that he had forgotten all other women in his past. She had provided a cent per cent fulfillment of his sensual appetite. He said to Karim, " I'll pay tomorrow...also the hotel bill. I had only ten left today after paying for the whisky."

Karim said, "Does'nt matter.... I'm very happy you settled Sharda... She was making my life a misery. Now she's no better than Shakuntala.

Karim went away and Sharda returned with Munni in her arms. Nazir gave her a fiver, but Sharda declined to accept it. Nazir smiled at her refusal and said, "What are you doing? I'm her father."

Sharda very quietly took the money. At first she had seemed very talkative, as if she would gush out with a torrent of words, but now she fought shy of conversation. Nazir took her baby on his lap and cuddled her. As he got up to leave, he said, "Sharda, I'm going now. If not tomorrow, I'll come the day after."

But Nazir turned up the very next day. Sharda's physical sincerity had cast a spell on him. He paid Karim for his previous visit, gave him money for whisky and was soon closetted with Sharda. When he offered her a drink, she said, " I told you that was the first and the last time."

Nazir drank by himself. He remained in the hotel room with Sharda from 11-30 a.m. to 7 p.m. When he returned home he had a feeling of contentment, great contentment, more than he had felt after the first meeting. In spite of her plain features and taciturnity she had an over powering appeal for his carnal appetite. Nazir made several attempts to analyse his reaction,

"What sort of a woman is she?...Never in my life have I met a woman who could express herself so inadequately with her tongue and so eloquently with her body."

Nazir came to her again and again. After two months, Nazir's budget could no longer bear the increasing deficit. He felt that Sharda had become a very important and vital part of sensual life. He slept with his wife but felt that something was missing. He wanted Sharda in her place. This was a wicked thought. Because he was conscious of this, Nazir tried to end his affair with Sharda. He said to her, "Sharda, I'm married. All my money, all my savings are gone. I don't know what to do. I can't keep away from you, although I never want to come here again."

Sharda did not say anything and there was silence. After some time she spoke, "You can take all the money I have; only let me have the fare up to Jaipur. I'll take Shakuntala and go back."

Nazir caressed her and said, "You'll do nothing of the sort: I did not mean that I've spent too much money; rather I've run through my account. I was wondering how I could continue my visits to you."

Sharda did not say anything in reply. The next day, when Nazir called, after taking a loan from a friend, Karim told him that she had packed and was leaving for Jaipur. Nazir sent for her, but she did not come. She sent a wad of notes and a message, "Please accept this... and let me have your address."

Nazir gave Karim his address, but returned the money. Sharda came, with Munni in her arms, greeted Nazir and said, "I'm going to Jaipur this evening."

"Why?" asked Nazir.

Sharda replied briefly, "I don't know". And she went away. Nazir asked Karim to bring her back, but she refused to come. Nazir went away. He felt as if the warmth of his body had cooled down, as if the only solution to his problem was suddenly beyond his reach.

She had gone away, really gone away. Karim was very sorry. He complained, "Nazir sahib, why did you let her go?"

Nazir said to him, "Friend, I'm no *seth,* I can't afford fifty rupees every day, to say nothing of the extra ten for the room, thirty for the bottle and more for extras...I'm bankrupt ... By God! I'm in debt."

Karim said, "Nazir sahib, she was in love with you!"

Nazir did not know the meaning of love. All he knew was that Sharda was physically sincere, and was capable of fully satisfying the craving of his flesh. Beyond this he knew nothing else about Sharda, except her brief explanation that her husband was a rake and had deserted her because in two years she had not borne him a child. But nine months after he had left her, Munni was born and she was the spiting image of her father.

She took Shakuntala with her, to get her married so that she could lead a respectable life. Karim told Nazir that Sharda was very fond of him. Karim had tried his best to set her up in the profession. He brought many passengers who were prepared to pay two hundred rupees a night, but Sharda would not hear of it; in fact, she would tell him off. Karim would remonstrate with her, "What else are you doing?" She would reply, "If you weren't the intermediary, I would'nt do this. I would'nt let Nazir Sahib spend a pie."

Sharda had once asked Nazir for a picture of his. He had brought one from home and given it to her. She took it to Jaipur with her. She had never spoken to Nazir of her love for him; she never spoke in bed , even when Nazir tried to make her say something. He was very much taken up with her physical sincerity and so far as this was concerned he considered her the personification of sincerity.

She had gone away and Nazir felt as if a load had lifted from his shoulders. Her presence had begun to cast a deep shadow over his domestic life. Had she stayed a little longer, it was quite possible that Nazir might have become completely estranged from his wife. After some days he began to regain his equilibrium and the lingering warm caresses of Sharda's body began to cool and die.

Fifteen days later, Nazir was at home, looking through some office papers, when his wife handed him the morning mail. She

always opened all the letters. Opening one, she said to Nazir, "This is in *Gujrati* or Hindi." Nazir took the letter but he, too, could not make out whether it was in Gujrati or Hindi. He put the letter in a tray and took up his office papers again. Nazir's wife called her younger sister, Naeema, and handing her the letter said, "Read it, you know both Hindi and Gujrati.. what does it say?"

Naeema glanced at the letter and said, "It's in Hindi," and she began reading it, "Jaipur...Dear Nazir sahib...", and she stopped Nazir gave a start. Naeema read another sentence. "You must have forgotten me, but ever since I came here I have been thinking of you." Naeema reddened. She looked at the second page and said, "It's from a Sharda."

Nazir rose quickly and took the letter from Naeema's hand and said to his wife, "God know's who she is?...I'm going out.... I shall get it translated into Urdu." Before his wife could say anything, he was out of the house. He went to a friend's place, got a writing pad and also ink of the colour used by Sharda and had a letter written in Hindi. The opening sentences of the original letter were retained but the ones that followed said that she had met him at Bombay Central and that she was pleased to have met such a well known artist and so on.

When he returned home that evening he handed the forged letter to his wife and read out its Urdu translation. His wife enquired about Sharda and he said, "Long ago, I went to see off a friend. He knew Sharda and introduced us on the platform. She was interested in learning how to paint."

The letter was forgotten, but two days later, another letter arrived from Sharda. Nazir managed to explain away this letter as well, and immediately sent Sharda a wire, asking her to stop writing and await his new address. He went to the post office and told the postman not bring home letters bearing the Jaipur postmark; he would call for them himself. He received three letters under this arrangement and after that Sharda's letters were addressed to him care of a friend.

Sharda was never much of a talker, but her letters were very long. She had never spoken to Nazir of her love for him, but her letters were full of it, besides the usual reproaches and yearnings

that make up most love letters. Nazir's love for Sharda was not of the kind that fills most cheap novels and stories. He did not know what to write to her. His friend helped him out. He would write the letters in Hindi and read them out to Nazir, who would always say, "Yes, that'll do."

Sharda was restless. She wanted to come to Bombay, but she did not want to stay with Karim. Nazir could not make any arrangements for her lodgings because of the acute housing position. He thought of a hotel, but was afraid that his affair with Sharda might get around. He had his friend write to Sharda that she should wait.

Meanwhile, communal disturbances began. Before the partition of the sub-continent there was great panic. His wife said she wanted to go to Lahore. "I shall stay there for some time. If conditions improve, I'll return, otherwise you also come there."

For some days, Nazir tried to talk her out of her decision, but when her brother left, she and her sister accompanied him. Nazir was alone in the house. He had this casually mentioned in his next letter to Sharda. She wired back that she was coming. The wire suggested that she had left Jaipur. Nazir was in a fix, but he was really happy for his body wanted to experience again the warm hospitality of Sharda's flesh. He wanted to relive those days when he would remain with Sharda from eleven in the morning to seven in the evening. Now he would not have to spend money, for Karim would have nothing to do with the arrangement and there would be no hotel room charges. He thought, "I'll take the servant in to my confidence, buy his silence with ten rupees. He won't say any thing to my wife when she comes back."

The next day he went to Bombay Central to meet the Frontier Mail. He looked through the train but did not find Sharda. He presumed that she must been detained for some reason, and would wire again.

The next morning he was on his way to office by train. When he alighted at Mahalaxmi he saw Sharda on the platform. He called out loudly, "Sharda."

Sharda looked towards him, "Nazir sahib!"

"You here."

Sharda complained, "You did not meet me and I went to your office. I was told that you had not arrived so I came here to wait for you."

Nazir thought the matter over and said, "You wait here, I'll go to office, take leave for the day and come back here."

Leaving Sharda on a bench, he went to the office, wrote out an application for leave, handed it to the peon, returned to the platform and took Sharda home. They did not exchange any words on the way, for they were conscious of their nearness, of the bodies coming into contact with every jolt of the gharry.

On reaching home, Nazir said to Sharda, "You have a bath, I'll fix up some breakfast for you."

While Sharda was in the bathroom. Nazir said to the servant that a friend's wife had arrived and that he should quickly prepare breakfast for her. After this Nazir went to the almirah, took out a bottle of whisky, poured out a double peg, added some water and had the drink. He wanted to make love to Sharda in the same mood as in the hotel.

Sharda came out fresh from the bath and started on the breakfast. She began to chatter about a number of things. Nazir felt a change in her. She had never talked much before, in fact, she had hardly ever opened her mouth. Now she used every pretext to speak of her love for him. Nazir thought, "What is this love?... I wish she wouldn't speak of it. I preferred her silence, it conveyed so much to me. I wonder what's come over her? She speaks as if she's reading out her love letters!"

After breakfast Nazir poured out a peg for Sharda, but she refused it. He insisted and to please him Sharda, holding her nose between her fingers, drained the glass. She made a wry face and flushed her mouth with water. Nazir was disappointed at Sharda taking the drink; it would have been better if she had persisted in her refusal. But he did not think much about it. He sent his servant out on an errand to a distant place, bolted the door and went to bed with Sharda. "In your letter you wondered when those days would come back. Well, they are back, not only days but nights also. In those days there were no clean beds.

Now, there, are no hotel charges and no Karim. Here we our own masters."

Sharda began to speak of her feelings for him. It was like a passage from a romantic novel full of cheap sentiment. She described how she had borne the pangs of separation, how she had passed the nights, counting stars, and between sighs she darted reproaches at him. Nazir took another peg and thought, "Who counts stars? How can anyone count the countless stars... its absolute rot.. nonsense!"

With these thoughts in his mind, he drew Sharda closer to him. The bed was clean. Sharda was clean. He was clean himself. The atmosphere in the room was clean. But why was it that he did not feel as close to Sharda as he did when he lay with her on the hard bed in the filthy hotel.

Nazir wondered whether it was due to his not having had enough whisky. He got up, poured himself a peg, gulped it down and came back to Sharda in the bed. Sharda started again on how she had pined for him and reiterated her reproaches. This upset Nazir. He was annoyed for this mood blunted his physical sensitivity. He felt that Sharda was a worn out bone that could no longer sharpen his carnal appetite. But in spite of this he lay by her side for a long time.

When he finally rose from the bed he wanted to take a taxi and go home to his wife , but when he realised that he was in his own home and that his wife was in Lahore, he felt unhinged. He wished his home was the hotel, that he should pay ten rupees as its rent, another fifty to Karim and go away.

Sharda was physically sincere as before, but the atmosphere was not the same. There was no bargaining, no giving with one hand and taking with the other. He also missed the filthiness of the hotel. All this had gone to make an atmosphere. That atmosphere was not here. Nazir was in his own home, on that bed on which his simple and trusting wife slept with him. This fact troubled him subconsciously. He could not make out what was wrong. Sometimes he thought the whisky was weak or that Sharda had not given him the same attention or that she should not have talked so much. But he would consider that she had met him after a long separation and was justified in speaking

out her feelings. She would return to normal in a day or two and be the Sharda he knew.

Fifteen days passed but Nazir had still not found the Sharda of the hotel. Her baby was in Jaipur; she had been a part of her at the hotel. Nazir had to get medicines for her cold , throat and boils. He did not have to do it now. Sharda was now all alone. Nazir had always thought of her and Munni as one.

Once he had pressed Sharda too close to him and some drops of milk from her swollen breasts had dripped on to his hairy chest. The sensation was indescribable. He had thought how wonderful it was to be a mother... and this milk...he felt the shortcoming of the males, who just ate and produced nothing. Women fed themselves and others....It was a very noble function to wean.

Now Munni was not with Sharda. Sharda was incomplete. Her breasts, too, were not full. They were without milk, the white nectar of life. She did not now protest, when he pressed her against his breast. Sharda was not the same, though in fact she was. Rather she was more of the Sharda he knew, the Sharda who was physically so sincere. With separation her sincerity had deepened and in addition she was also in love with him. But Nazir felt that she no longer had that attraction or whatever it was which had drawn him to her.

He had arrived at this conclusion after having lived with her for fifteen days. He had absented himself from office for this period, which he felt was the limit. Nazir began going to office again, regularly. Sharda looked after him with wifely devotion. She bought wool from the bazar and knitted him a sweater. On his return from office in the evening he would find that she had already got soda for him and put ice in the thermos flask. In the morning she put out his razor, brush and shaving soap for him, had the water warmed up and when he had finished shaving, she would wash and dry the razor and the brush. She swept the flat and kept it tidy. This irked Nazir all the more.

They had slept together every night, but now Nazir wanted to sleep alone. He told Sharda that he was giving shape to and idea in his mind and wanted to be alone.... He made her sleep in a separate bed. But this presented Nazir with another problem. She would sleep soundly, but he would remain wide awake and

wonder what all this was about....Why was Sharda here? He had spent some very pleasant days with her at Karim's hotel, but why was she sticking to him? How would all this end? He did not believe in love: It was a minor thing that did not matter. Sharda should go back to Jaipur.

Some days later he began to feel troubled with the thought that he was leading a life of sin. He had committed similar acts at Karim's hotel and many times before his marriage but his conscience had never been troubled. He now felt very guilty that he was being unfaithful to his wife. His simple wife whom he had several times hoodwinked over Sharda's letters. Sharda attracted him even less now, and his manner towards her became curt. But her attitude remained the same. She made allowance for his being temperamental because he was an artist and did not reproach him for the change in his attitude towards her.

She had been with him a month. Nazir felt greatly perturbed when he realised that she had spent thirty days and nights with him. "Has this woman lived here a month?...What a scoundrel I am and I write to my wife everyday like a faithful husband, as if I think of her constantly and find life incomplete without her. I am a big fraud! I am being unfaithful both to my wife and Sharda. Why don't I tell her frankly that I no longer have the old feeling for her. But the real issue is whether I am no longer the same towards her or whether she is no longer the Sharda I knew?"

He would ponder over this, but would find no satisfactory answer. His mind was in a turmoil. He would now worry about morality. His conscience was always clouded with a feeling of guilt that he was being unfaithful to his wife. After some days this feeling became even more acute. He began to hate himself. "I am a rotter. Why has this woman become my second wife? When did I ever need her? Why is she sticking to me? Why did I let her come here? When her telegram came....but it reached me when it was impossible for me to stop her."

He would also think about Sharda and feel that she was artificial and that she wanted to estrange him from his wife. At this thought Sharda went down further in his estimation. He became more curt with her. She, however, became more submissive and

spared herself no effort to attend to his every need and want. He began to hate her all the more.

One day he discovered himself to be without any cash. He had forgotten to draw money from the bank. He was very late for office, because he was not feeling well. As he was about to leave, Sharda said something to him and he lost his temper. "Shut up, I'm quite alright. I forgot to draw money from the bank and I've run out of cigarettes."

He got a tin of Gold Flakes from a stall near his office. He did not care much for this brand, but had taken it because he was allowed credit. He smoked a couple of them. On his return home in the evening he found a tin of his favorite brand of cigarettes on the teapoy in his room. He thought it was an empty tin, but he reached for it hoping it may have a couple of cigarettes left. On opening it, he found it full. He asked Sharda, "Where did this tin come from?"

Sharda replied, with a smile, "It was in the almirah."

Nazir did not say anything. He thought that he might have forgotten about it after opening it and putting it in the almirah. The next day there was another full tin on the teapoy. When Nazir questioned Sharda about it, she smiled and gave him the same answer, "It was in the almirah."

In a fit of anger, Nazir said, "Sharda, you are lying, I don't like this. I can buy what I need. I'm not a beggar that you should bestow cigarettes on me every day."

Sharda said, with great tenderness, "I've taken this liberty twice because I knew you would forget to buy them.

Unreasonably, Nazir became angrier, "I am going out of my mind.... but I don't like your taking these liberties."

Shahrda's tone became even more softer. "Please forgive me."

For a moment Nazir thought that Sharda was not to blame and that he should step forward and kiss her for her steadfast devotion. But at the same time he thought of his wife to whom he was being unfaithful. He spoke to Sharda in a voice full of hatred. "Hold your tongue. I think I should pack you off tomorrow. I'll give you as much money as you want in the

morning." Having said this Nazir felt that he had acted like an absolute rotter.

Sharda did not say anything. She slept with Nazir and caressed him all night. This irritated Nazir, but he controlled his feelings. In the morning he found a sumptuous and delicious breakfast laid out for him. Sharda still did not say anything to him. After breakfast he went to the bank. All that he said to Sharda, before he left was, "I'm going to the bank and I'll be back soon!"

The branch office of the bank, where Nazir had his account was quite near his home. He did not take much time to draw two hundred rupees and hurry back home. He wanted to hand over the entire sum to Sharda, buy her a railway ticket and send her off. But when he reached home, his servant told him that she had already left. He asked him, "Where did she go?"

His servant said,"She didn't say anything....She took her trunk and bedding with her."

Nazir entered his room and found a tin of his favourite brand of cigarettes on the teapoy. It was full!

the insult

WORN out by her day's work, Saugandhi had gone to bed and fallen asleep almost immediately. The sanitary inspector of the local municipality whom she called Seth, had just released her from his lusty embraces and gone home to his wife. He would have stayed the rest of the night but for the great consideration he had for his wife, who, as he had told Saugandhi, loved him with deep reverence. He had staggered out of the room drunk and had left Saugandhi covered with bruises and with stinging pain in every bone and muscle in her body.

The money she had received from Seth in return for the physical services rendered, Saugandhi had placed in her tight, spittle-stained *choli*, which barely coverd her bosom. As she slept, her heavy breathing disturbed the coins between her breasts and their dull metallic clinking mixed with the irregular beat of her heart, as if the rupees were melting slowly and their sliver dripping into her blood stream.

Her chest was burning from within, due to the half pint of brandy Seth had brought with him and the country liquor they had taken with water, after running short of soda.

Saugandhi was sleeping on her back, on a solidly built commodious teak bed, her arms framing her head like the skeleton of an oval kite which has lost its papers in the dew. Her right arm-pit, discoloured by the frequent application of the razor, was like a piece of skin off a plucked fowl.

Saugandhi's room was very small, with a number of things scattered about, untidily. Three or four pairs of shrivelled, worn-out sandals lay under the bed, serving as a pillow for a dog, snarling at something in his sleep. Stricken with mange the dog was hairless in the more severely affected parts. From a distance, it resembled a worn-out doormat rolled into a bundle.

On a small shelf horizontal to the bed, lay Saugandhi's toilet -- her rouge, lipstick, powder, comb and some steel hair pins. In a cage, dangling on a long hook next to the shelf, slept a parrot with its head buried in the grey feathers of its breast. The cage was full of rotting pieces of guava and orange peels, smelling in various stages of decomposition and covered with squadrons of black mosquitoes and other insects.

Close to the bed stood a chair, its head-rest glistening with oily dirt. On one side of it was an elegant teapoy, supporting a portable gramophone draped in dirty, decaying cloth. Rusty gramophone needles were scattered on the table and all over the small room. On the wall above this table, were four framed pictures of different men. A little way off was a brightly coloured picture of Ganesh, garlanded with fresh and faded flowers it seemed to have been detached from a roll of long cloth, where it had served as a trade mark. In a little niche near this picture, burnt a small clay oil-lamp, its flame steady in the closed and unventilated room like the *tilak* mark on a forehead. A little cup containing oil to replenish the lamp, when necessary, stood by in the niche and around it lay stubs of incense.

Saugandhi always offered her day's first earning to this picture of Ganesh, then touched her own forehead with the money and finally slipped it into her *choli*. She always placed her money there and her big firm breasts kept it safe. But, whenever, Madho came from Poona, she hid her earnings in a small hole, made specially for the purpose, near one of the bed-posts. She had been advised to do this by her pimp. Ramlal, who was outraged when he heard that Madho actually took money from Saugandhi rather than give her something, whenever he paid her a visit.

Ramlal had upbraided Saugandhi, "Since when have you accepted this Madho as your lover? This is a strange affair. The *sala* doesn't spend a pie from his pocket, has a good time all the same and at the end of it, goes away richer. Saugandhi, I don't like this at all. There must be something in this *sala* that has captivated you. I have been in this business for seven years and I know you girls inside out."

Ramlal who touted for over a hundred prostitutes in Bombay, ranging from the ten to the hundred rupees class, also gave

Saugandhi some advice. "Sali, why are you ruining yourself. One day this lover of your mother will take away even the very clothes off your body....I know the type. Make a little hole near this bed-post and hide all your money in it. Whenever he comes, say to him, `I swear by your life Madho, I haven't seen a pie since the morning. Get me a cup of tea and some biscuits from the cafe outside....I'm famished?...understand? Say that...my dear, business is not good these days; this damned Congress has hit us hard by introducing prohibition...But *sali*, how do you still manage to get something to drink? By Bhagwan; whenever I see an empty bottle in your room and smell the spirit, I wish my soul could migrate to your body."

Saugandhi was fond of her bosom more than any other part of her body. Once Jamuna had said to her, "Why don't you put these bombs of flesh into a brassiere? They will lose their firmness if you leave them hanging on their own."

Saugandhi had laughed and said, "Jamuna, you think everyone is like yourself. People come and tear your body to bits for a paltry ten rupee note and you imagine the same happens to everyone else. I'd like to see anyone taking liberties with my person. That reminds me, I almost forget to tell you. Last night, Ramlal brought in a Punjabi; very late, actually it was about two in the morning. As we went to bed, I switched off the light.....and would you believe it, Jamuna, he actually began to tremble; his masculine dignity crumbled in the darkness and he became suddenly timid. I said to him Hurry up! What are you waiting for? It is nearly three and it will soon be day. He implored. Put on the light, please, the light, I was greatly amused and replied that I had no intention of complying with the request. I took a pinch at his fleshy thigh and he jumped clean out of the bed. The sissy. After fumbling for the switch, he put on the light. I at once pulled up the coverlet and said, Aren't you ashamed, and as he returned to the bed, I sprang up and out went the light again. He began to whimper. By your life Jamuna, it was fun? Sometimes light, sometimes darkness! No sooner did the trams start grating, than he hurriedly dressed and ran off. The *sala* must have taken the thirty rupees he left with me off the stock exchange. Oh Jamuna, you are so artless; I can teach you so many tricks for dampening the fiery spirits."

Saugandhi really did know many of the tricks of the trade she boasted about and generally passed them on to some of her friends in the profession. Her usual instructions were: "When the customer is a gentleman and talks little, play many pranks on him and keep on chattering; tickle him and tease him. If he has a beard keep running your fingers through it and pull out a few hairs. If he has protruding belly, treat it like a drum. Don't give him time to work his will. He will go away happy and you will be saved from undue privation. But beware of the lean silent ones; they would crush you out of shape if they had their way."

But Saugandhi was not really as clever as she pretended to be. She had very few customers and even with them, her devices were of little help. She was a very sentimental girl and whenever someone spoke a few sweet and touching words to her, all her tricks would slip from her heart and disappear in her stomach. This part of her body which was uncovered revealed the marks of her only experience of child bearing, resembling the scratches made by her dog on the ground, whenever a bitch passed by seductively.

Saugandhi was sensuous by inclination but a few warm fragrant words whispered into her ears would melt her mental state and cause her to flow into all parts of her body. Though her reason disapproved of the physical relation between man and woman, her body was responsive to it. Her body yearned for fatigue; the sort which squeezes out all the strength from the body and forcibly lulls it to sleep, like the state of unconsciousness after a good hard thrashing, when pain no longer matters, instead, it caresses every bone and muscle in the body to slumber. It was this state of partial oblivion that Saugandhi was fond of, when she could feel her consciousness slowly ebbing away and then come back, creeping softly. She would feel herself suspended high up in the heavens, with a strong wind supporting her aloft and blowing upon her from all sides. To be thus suspended in vast space, feeling as light and as unattached as a soap-bubble in the air, was for Saugandhi the acme of human happiness. And the more difficult it became for her to breathe in this condition, the estatic became her bliss.

Even as a child when she hid in her mother's big trunk, during a game of hide and seek, Saugandhi had found peculiar pleasure in

the difficulty she had then experienced in breathing in that close space; a pleasure which had mingled with the beat of her excited heart and the fear of being found out.

Saugandhi wanted to spend her whole life hidden in some such box, with her seekers outside. She wanted them to find her sometimes; so that she too could have a turn at hunting for others. The life she had been leading these last few years, was sometimes like a game of hide and seek. Sometimes she would look for customers and at others they would pick their way to her. Her life was passing in this manner. She was happy because she had to be happy; it was her business. On most nights, she would have a man besides her on her wide bed. On all occasions, in spite of her resolve to be indifferent to her customer and not let him have more than the mere elementary satisfaction, Saugandhi would forget even the clever tricks she passed on to her friends, to help them in such moments and abandon herself in his arms like a love thirsty woman in a whirlpool of passion.

Whenever her new or old companions would say, "Saugandhi I love you," she would know that the man was lying but would soften and actually believe that she was being loved. Love! Could any word be sweeter? She wanted to make a balm of the word and rub it all over her body; massage it hard till it penetrated every pore in her skin or she would wish to dissolve herself in the word, contract herself and after entering it somehow, shut the lid, as if it were a box. Sometimes, when the urge to love or be loved grew very strong. Saugandhi wished to take the man beside her on her lap, sing lullabies and rock him to sleep.

Saugandhi's capacity for loving others was large. She could have fallen in love with any of the men who paid for her love and she could have sustained that feeling. Even now she was in love with four men whose pictures adorned her room. Saugandhi always felt that she was very large hearted, but wondered why the same quality was not to be found in men. She could not understand this and once involuntarily she said to her image in the mirror, "Saugandhi, the world has not treated you well."

The events of these last five years, every day and night of them, had left their mark on every aspect of her life. She had not got

all the happiness she had wanted in this period, but she still wished to pass the rest of her days in the same manner. Money did not interest her much. She was not very ambitious and had no desire to accumulate great wealth. Her usual rate for the night was ten rupees, of which, one-fourth was kept by Ramlal as his commission. Seven and half rupees were more than enough for her needs. She even managed to save something for Madho, whenever he came from Poona, as Ramlal put it , to collect tribute from her.

She always gave him ten or fifteen rupees and this, as Ramlal had also observed, because she had a soft corner in her heart for Madho. Ramlal was right. Saugandhi had been drawn towards Madho since their very first meeting. He had said to her "Aren't you ashamed at the bargain you are trying to drive with me? Do you realize what your are trying to sell and why I have come to you?....Chee, chee, chee...Ten rupees, out of which, as you say, Ramlal keeps two rupees eight annas as his commission...that leaves you seven rupees eight annas...doesn't it?...and in return for these seven and a half rupees you promise to give me something that is priceless and I like a fool am offering you money for it. I want a woman's love, your love...will you dole it out in proportion to the money you receive? Don't you ever feel the need of a man's love and protection?....Don't you like me?....Are these ten rupees, of which you get only seven and a half, to be our only bond? I can hear them jingling between us and so can you....Why can't we be of help to each other? Let us need each other.

"I am a police *havaldar* in Poona and can come to Bombay for three or four days every month. Give up this profession. I'll send you a regular monthly allowance...What's the rent of this room?"

These and other statements made by Madho that day had impressed Saugandhi so much that for some moments she had begun to imagine herself a *havaldarni*. Madho had also neatly arranged the various objects in the room. He had taken down some pictures of nudes hanging above Saugandhi's bed and without asking her, torn them to bits, saying, "Saugandhi, I won't let you have such pictures in your room...and look at this water pitcher, how dirty it is?... and why are you preserving

these rags and tatters? How they smell...throw them out of the window... and look at the state of your hair...and...and..."

This had gone on for three hours, after which Saugandhi and Madho were very much at home with each other; Saugandhi feeling as if she had known the *havaldar* for many years. Till, now no one had noticed the filthiness of her water pitcher; the obscenity of the nude pictures or made her feel that she could make a home of this little room. Men had come and not even noticed the repulsive stains on her bed-sheets. No one had ever said, "Saugandhi, see how red your nose is; you've caught a cold. Shall I get you some medicine." Madho was so considerate; every word of his was a comfort. How he had told her off for her shabbiness. Saugandhi had begun to feel that she was in need of someone like Madho and had agreed to his proposal.

Madho would come from Poona every month and on his return would say. "Look Saugandhi, if you keep to your profession, I won't have anything to do with you, and if I ever catch another man in your room, I'll take you by the hair and throw you out of the house...and yes, I will send you this month's allowance by postal order as soon as I get back to Poona...What's the rent of this room?"

This allowance promised by Madho every time he visited Bombay never came; nor did Saugandhi give up her livelihood. Both knew the worthlessness of their promises.

Saugandhi never said, "Madho, why do you throw all these threats at me? You have never sent me a pie" nor did Madho ever ask Saugandhi, "Where do you get all this money from: I never send you any." Both were liars and lived in a world of make believe, taking no cognisance of the facts as they were. But Saugandhi was happy, like those who are reconciled to what they can get.

Saugandhi had forgotten to turn off the light after the sanitary inspector had left. The harsh glare from the naked electric bulb which hung above her head, flooded her plucked eye brows and pricked at her eyelids; but they remained closed heavy with sleep.

There was a knock on the door. Who could it be at this hour of the night? Saugandhi heard the knocking, but faintly, as if from a great distance. There was another knock, a louder one and she woke up with a start. Her lips were coated with a thin layer of foam, smelling of the two kinds of liquors she had taken that night, and of the fish she had eaten, bits of which still filled the crevices between her teeth. After wiping the foam with the flap of her *dhoti,* she began rubbing her eyes. She found herself alone in the bed. She bent over and saw her dog under the bed, its head resting on her sandals, still snarling at something in his sleep. She looked at the parrot and found the bird fast asleep with its head plunged in the feathers of its breast.

There was another impatient knock on the door. Saugandhi got up, her head splitting with pain. She poured out a mug of water from the pitcher and gargled; then poured out another and after draining it in a draught, opened the door.

"Ramlal !" she exclaimed.

Ramlal who had got fed up knocking asked, "What's the matter? Has a snake sniffed you?...I have been knocking for nearly an hour...What were you doing?..."and then lowering his voice to a whisper, "Is anyone inside?"

"No."

Ramlal again raised his voice and repeated his question, "Then why didn't you open the door? By Bhagwan, what a sleep you have. How much business do you think I'd do if it took me two hours to fix you girls up for one assignment?... and now don't stand there gaping at me, go change your *dhoti;*... Put on your silk *sari.* the one printed over with large flowers...hurry up. Thee's *Seth* waiting outside in his car."

Saugandhi sat down in the arm chair, while Ramlal walked up to the mirror and begau to comb his hair.

She picked up a small bottle from the *teapoy* and opening it said, "Ramlal, I am not feeling well today."

Ramlal replaced the comb on the shelf and turning round said knowingly, "Is that so? Why didn't you let me know?"

Rubbing her forehead with the balm from the bottle, Saugandhi replied, "It's not what you think, Ramlal, I just don't feel well enough...I drank too much.'

Ramlal's mouth watered. "Have you any left? I'd like to feel some of it on my tongue...this damned Congress....I" Saugandhi replaced the bottle on the teapoy and remarked "If some had been left I wouldn't have got this infernal hangover.....look Ramlal, why don't you go and ask the *Seth* to come up...?

"Oh no! he can't come in here, he is a big *Seth*...He hesitated even in bringing his car into the lane. You hurry up and change, we'll walk up to his car...everything will be alright."

It was just a matter of seven and a half rupees. Normally, Saugandhi would have cared more for her headache, but at present she was badly in need of funds. She wanted some money for her next door neighbour, a Madrasi woman, who had recently lost her husband in a car accident.

Saugandhi had comforted her and her young daughter and had promised to get them money for their journey home. She had said, "Don't worry, I am expecting my man from Poona shortly and I'll get some money from him for your fare." Madho certainly was expected from Poona, but Saugandhi knew that she had to arrange for the money herself. With this in mind she got up and within five minutes had changed into the *sari* recommended by Ramlal and had completed her toilet. After another mug of cold water, she announced herself ready to accompany Ramlal.

They stepped out of the building into the silent lane which was wider than most roads in small towns. By the light of a misty gas lamp, which had been partly blacked out due to the war, Saugandhi could make out the hazy outline of a car, parked at the corner of the lane.

The shadowy appearance of the black car in the dim light and the secretive silence of the early hours of the morning, added to Saugandhi's discomfort. She felt as if her hangover had affected the atmosphere in the lane. The very air she breathed seemed to smell of the brandy and the country liquor she had drunk a few hours before.

Ramlal went ahead and spoke to someone in the car. When Saugandhi reached him, he stepped aside and announced, "Here she is...a very nice girl...entered the profession only a few days ago." Then turning round, he called, "Saugandhi come here, sethji is asking for you."

Twisting the flap of her *Sari* round one of her fingers, Saugandhi came forward and stood near the car. The *Seth* from his seat flashed a torch on her face, and for a moment dazzled her still sleepy eyes. There was a click and the light went out.

"Oh no!" cried the *seth* in a fussy voice. The car's engine spluttered and the automobile moved away.

What had happened? The torchlight was still in Saugandhi's eyes. She had not even been able to see the *Seth*'s face distinctly. What did, "Oh No!" mean? These two words were still vibrating in her ears. What did they mean?

She heard Ramlal saying, "He didn't like you...I will be getting along. I have wasted two hours for nothing."

When she heard this, Saugandhi's legs, arms, hands, her entire body was convulsed with one desire; to do something. Where was that car? Where was that *Seth*? So, "Oh no!" meant that he did not like her? May his.....!!"

An oath welled up rom the pit of her stomach, but stopped on the tip of her tongue. Whom was she to spatter with this abuse? The car was no longer there, already its red tail-light was vanishing into the absorbing darkness of the night.

Saugandhi looked at the red light and thought it was mocking her. Every time the car bumped, she felt the words "Oh no!" being drilled deeper into her breast. She wanted to call out "Oh *Seth*, oh *Seth*...stop your car...just for a moment..." But the *Seth* and the car had already disappeared from sight. Saughandhi found herself alone in the dark, deserted lane. Her Sari with the printed flower pattern, which she wore on special occasions, fluttered unconcernedly in the soft breeze. She loathed this Sari and its silken rustling. She wanted to tear it to bits. She felt as if the Seth was radiating "Oh no!..." every time it flapped in the breeze.

She had rouged her cheeks and painted her lips. Why? To attarct the *Seth,* of course. Saugandhi remembered this and perspiration began to ooze out of her body. She thought of several things to get over this feeling of humiliation.

"I didn't dress myself up for that swine's sake...this is usual with me and everyone else...but...but...this early hour of the morning...Ramlal...this lane and that car...and that flash of the torch..." At the thought of the torch, Saugandhi saw dark spots still floating before her eyes and her ears began to throb again with the noise of the car engine.

The balm on her forehead which she had wiped while dressing, began to prick the perspiring skin. She felt as if the forehead was not her own. The cool breeze striking against it was like a piece of cold tin being rivetted to her skin. She knew she still had a headache, but in the turmoil of her thoughts, the sensation of pain was lost. She made several efforts to probe through the disturbance in her mind and feel the pain that was there, but in vain. She wanted her whole body to ache, her head, arms, stomach, every limb, with such pain as would make her immune to every thing else. Suddenly something clutched at her heart. What ache was it? Curse it, it was the same "Oh no...!" being pumped into her arteries.

Saugandhi moved towards her house, but stopped after a couple of steps. "Ramlal thinks that the *Seth* didn't like my face..but no, he never said anything about my face...he just said, Saugandhi, he didn't like you...And ; what if he didn't like my face? I myself don't like the faces of so many men. The one who came on Amavas night, what a face he had; Didn't I turn up my nose at him?....Didn't I almost vomit?...Yes, Saugandhi, yes...but you didn't turn him away, you didn't say `Oh no'...! to him. You slept with him; in his arms, close to his face...But this *Seth* spat in your face; he spurned you...`Oh no!' ...he must have thought, `Oh! Ramlal, how did you ever dare present me with this lizard?"

Saugandhi continued to ruminate over the incident and waves of indignation surged through her entire body, from the tip of her toes to the scalp of her head. Sometimes she was angry with herself and sometimes with Ramlal, who had disturbed her at

this late hour of the night. But acquitting herself and Ramlal, she would think of the *seth* and have but one desire; to get within striking distance of him. She very earnestly wished that the entire incident should repeat itself, just once. That she should advance slowly towards the car, a torch be flashed on her face and a voice say "Oh no!" and she Saugandhi ...leap forward like a wild cat, with her claws out and tear at the *Seth's* face with her long, manicured nails. She would drag him out of the car by his hair and rain blows on him with all the strength in her arms, till she grew tired, very tired and then she would sit down and cry.

Saugandhi thought of crying because her anger and helplessness had caused some tears to fill her eyes. She suddenly questioned them, "Why are you brimming over with tears?" This question continued to swim in her tears, which had now begun trembling on her lashes and through them she went on looking in the direction in which the *Seth's* car had disappeared.

Dhr...Dhr...Dhr...Where was this sound coming from? Saugandhi started and looked around in all directions, but could not locate the source. Oh! of course, it was her own heart. It was not a motor. Her heart, what had happened to her heart? Never before had it behaved like this! Was the blood clotting in it? It was struggling with the same beat over and over again, like one of her gramophone records with a defective groove in which the needle always got stuck and caused only one word to be repeated. "Stars...stars...stars... stars..."

Saugandhi looked at the sky and found it studded with stars. "How pretty they look," she thought. She wanted to divert her mind, but had looked at the wrong object.

"Pretty....yes, they are pretty, but what about yourself, you ugly witch? Have you forgotten how someone just now spat in your face?"

But Saugandhi was not ugly. All the images she had seen of herself in the mirror these last five years flashed before her eyes. She admitted that she was not as good looking as she was five years ago, when she was living a carefree life with her parents, but she had not become ugly. She still looked like any of those women, whom men probe with their eyes when passing them on the street. Saugandhi felt she possessed all those qualities which

a man looks for in a woman he wants to take to bed. She was young and her figure attractive. While bathing, she would look at her thighs and admire their silken firmness. She was cheerful and could not think of any of her nightly visitors having gone away dissatisfied. She was also very friendly and sympathetic by nature.

Last Christmas, when she was staying at Golpitha, a young boy had spent a night with her. The following morning, when he took his coat off the peg in the next room, he found his purse missing. It had been stolen by her servant, who had decamped during the night. Her young guest was very worried. He had come from Hyderabad to spend his vacation in Bombay and all the money he had brought with him was in that purse. He had not even the fare for his return journey. Saugandhi had felt sorry for him and had returned the money she had taken from him.

"What is wrong with me?" Saugandhi addressed this question to every object within her sight ; the dim gas-lamp, its iron post, the big stones on the pavement and the uneven and torn concrete lining the road. Saugandhi looked at all these things in turn and at the sky, which she felt was leaning on her, but got no reply to her query.

She knew the answer herself. She was not bad, in fact she was good; but she wanted someone else to say so as well. She wished someone would place his hand on her shoulder and say, Saugandhi, who says you are bad? If any one does, he is bad himself." But no, there was no need for anyone to say all that. Someone should just say, "Saugandhi, you are very good" ...or "good". That would be enough.

But why did she want someone to flatter her ? Till now she had never felt this need so keenly.

Why was she at this moment looking at even the inanimate things as if to convince them of her good qualities ? Why this maternal feeling which was suddenly stirring within her? She wanted to be mother to all things of the earth and to take them on her lap. Why did she want to fling her arms around the lamp-post and place her cheeks, her burning cheeks, against its iron surface and suck in all its metallic coolness ?

For a moment Saugandhi felt as if the misty gas lamp, the square pavement stones and all objects that were around her in the silence of the hour before dawn, were in sympathy with her. The sky spread above her, like a dark grey sheet full of holes, seemed to understand how she felt and was winking a message at her through the stars. Then why this turmoil in her mind ? Why did her inside feel like the weather just before rain. She wanted every pore in her body to open and whatever was boiling within her, to come steaming out. But how could this happen? How ? ?

Saugandhi was standing near the post-box at the corner of the lane. A sharp gust of breeze shook the iron flap of the post box hanging inwards in its open mouth. The creaking of the flap caused Saughandhi to strain her eyes once again in the direction in which the *Seth's* car had gone. but she could see nothing in motion. If only that car would come once again? And then.....

"Oh damn the car !...it needn't come. Why should I work myself into such a state over it ?...Saugandhi,go home and have a couple of glasses of cold water, rub some balm on your forehead and have a sound sleep...everything will be alright. Damn the Seth and his car!"

This attitude took the weight off Saugandhi's mind and she felt as if she had just taken a dip in a pool of calm cool water. She had the same feeling which she experienced after prayers. She felt so light that her steps faltered a number of times, as she walked back hoı e.

When she neared the building, which she and Ramlal had left only a few minutes before, the entire incident that had followed again surged into her mind. A twinge of pain shot through her heart and spread all over her body, pricking every pore as it went. Her steps became heavy again and she began to feel the insult with incıeasing bitterness. All the scenes of the incident seared their way through her mind; her being called from her room into the lane, the flash of the torch on her face and that `Oh No!; uttered by that contemptible Seth. Each scene gave her a dig in the ribs like a butcher's hard fingers examining the flesh of a sheep or a goat.

"This *Seth*... may Parmatma... !" Saugandhi tthought of putting a curse on the Seth, but of waht use would that be? What she really wanted was that she should have the *Seth* before her. She would have branded curses on his entire being and said things that would have disturbed him for the rest of his life. She would have torn off her clothes and stood before him stark naked, and said, "That is what you came to get... didn' you? Well have it !..... Take I free! I won't take a pie from you...But whatt I am...my soul....you cannot buy for all the money in the word!"

Many and varied were the ways of taking revenge that occurred to Saugandi. If only she could encounter that *Seth* again, just once. She would do this...no, like that. But, when Saugandhi realised that she had hardly any chance of ever seeing the *Seth* again, she saisfied herself by utttering a not too destructive viuperative; just a light abuse which she hoped would find the *Seth* and settle on his nose for ever like a sticky fly..

In this agitated state of mind Saugandhi mounted the two full flights of stairs to her room. She took out her key and extended her hand to unlock the door. The key turned in empty air. There was no lock on the door. Saugandhi examined the bolt and pushed the door. There was a rattling noise and someone unbolted the door from inside. Saugandhi entered the room.

It was Madho. He laughed through his moustache and closing the door after Saugandhi had entered, said "At last you have taken my advice...an early morning walk is the healthiest thing in the world. Keep it up and all your laziness will disappear and that backache of yours, of which you are frequently complaining, will also vanish. You must have walked up to the Victoria Gardens?" Saugandhi remained silent and Madho did not show any desire to press his question. This was usual; whenever Madho or Saugandhi spoke it was not necessary for the other to speak also and make conversation. They only spoke since one of them had to say something.

Madho sat down in the cane chair and rested his liberally oiled head on the greasy back of the chair. He crossed his legs and began to stroke his moustaches. Saugandhi sat on the bed and said to Madho, "I was expecting you today."

Madho was surprised, "How did you know I was coming?"

Saugandhi's moist lips parted and faint smile appeared, balancing itself on them, "I dreamt of you last night, but when I woke up there was no one. Instead of sleeping, again I decided to go out for a walk...and...and...."

"And when you returned, you found me here." Madho was delighted. "Then it is true, two hearts in love know each other....When did you have this dream?"

"At about four o'clock".

Madho got up from the chair and sat down next to Saugandhi. "...And I dreamt of you exactly at 2 o'clock. You were wearing that silk sari with the flower pattern...why you are wearing it right now!...I saw you standing near me...what did you have in your hand?....Oh yes! it was a bag full of rupees. You placed this bag on my lap and said "Madho, why do you worry? Take this. Is my money to be distinguished from yours?" Saugandhi, I swear by your life, I got up at once and caught the first train to Bombay. I don't know how to begin. I am in an awful mess. If only I had about twenty or thirty rupees to spare, I could grease the inspector's palm and slip out of his clutches...Saugandhi, I hope you aren't tired? Lie down, I'll press your feet...you aren't used to a morning walk and today's exercise must have tired you. Lie down and stretch your feet out towards me."

Saugandhi laid herself down with her head pillowed on her hands and began to speak to Madho in a tone quite unnatural to her. "Madho, who is this scoundrel who has got you into this mess? Is there any danger of your going to jail? What are twenty or thirty rupees, one would spend even fifty or hundred in a case like this; it is always the best way out. When dealing with the police the main thing is getting out of their clutches and not the cost. That will do Madho, stop pressing my feet...I am not very tired...tell me all about this affair. My heart's in a flutter ever since you mentioned it...When will you go back?"

Madho sniffed the smell of liquor from Saugandhi's mouth. He decided to take advantage of her condition and said, "I have to return by the afternoon train...the inspector has to be paid about

fifty rupees by this evening... Yes, I don't think I need give him more...fifty will do." Fifty?

Saugandhi got up from the bed slowly and walked up to the four pictures on the wall. The third frame from the left contained Madho's picture. He was seated before a screen with a distracting flower pattern and had both his hands on his thighs, palm downwards. He held a rose between the fingers of one hand. On a small table, next to the chair, on which Madho sat lay two thick books. Every feature of his seemed to be shouting. "I am being photographed...I am being photographed!" Madho was glaring at the room from his picture and it seemed that he must have suffered extreme torture before the camera.

Saugandhi suddenly burst out laughing. So sharp and brittle was her laugh that Madho felt as if he had been pricked by a shower of needles. He rose from the bed and walked up to her. "Whose picture are you laughing at so much?" he asked. Saugandhi pointed to the first photograph on the left. "At his, the municipal sanitary inspector's...just look at his belly. He says that once a Rani fell in love with him...Oh no! not with this face and figure....."

Saugandhi pulled down the picture with such force, that the nail supporting the frame, came out of the wall along with some plaster.

Madho had scarcely got over his initial bewilderment, when Saugandhi threw the picture out of the window. It fell on the pavement outside, two storeys below, and the sound of splintering glass came floating back through the window. Saugandhi remarked, "When Rani, the sweeper-woman, comes on her round tomorrow, she will sweep away the remains of this lover of royal Ranis." And again, that same sharp bitter laughter sparkled from Saugandhi's lips, as if she was sharpening a knife on them.

Madho forced a smile with considerable difficulty and laughed weakly, "Hee...Hee...Hee..."

Saugandhi snatched down the second frame and threw it out of the window. "What does this sala want here. No one with a face like his has any place here. What do you think, Madho?"

"Hee...Hee...Hee..."

With one hand Saugandhi plucked down the photograph of the man with the turban and stretched her other hand towards Madho's picture.

Madho stiffened, as if Saugandhi had extended her hand, towards him. In a second, the frame along with the nail, was in her hand.

Laughing hysterically and saying, "Oh no!" she threw both the pictures out of the window. When they hit the pavement, Madho felt as if something had splintered within him. Keeping his smile with a great effort, he said, "You did well; I, too, never liked the photo."

"You never liked the photo?"

Slowly Saugandhi walked up to Madho and added in a sharper tone, "Well, how could you? Is there anything about you that anybody could like? This shapeless nose, these swollen nostrils, this hairy forehead, these twisted ears, your foul breath, the filthiness of your body? You didn't like your own photo? Oh no! How could you, since it hid all your secrets and people do not like those who know their secrets."

Madho stepped back and when the wall prevented him from retreating any further, he spoke infusing all the sternness he could muster into his nervous voice. "Saugandhi, you seem to have returned to the profession. I am telling you, for the last time....."

Before Madho could tell Saugandhi anything new for the last time, she cut in and mimicking him, continued his sentence, "If I ever find another man in your room, I'll catch you by the hair and throw you out of the house...And I'll send you this month's allowance by postal order as soon as I get back to Poona. What's the rent of this room?"

Madho's head reeled.

Saugandhi continued, "I'll tell you. The rent is fifteen rupees a month and that of my body, ten rupees a night. And, as you know, two rupees eight annas go to Ramlal as his commission. That leaves seven rupees eight annas for me...doesn't it?...For

these seven and a half rupees, I promise you something which is priceless, something which cannot be bought. What is the bond between us? Love or money? So far ten rupees had jingled between us, now they have increased to fifty. You can hear them jingle and so can I....and look at the state of your hair!"

Saugandhi accompanied these words by extending her finger and tipping Madho's cap at such a rakish angle that it fell off.

Madho resented this action very much and said in ominous tones, "Saugandhi."

Saugandhi took out a handkerchief from Madho's pocket, sniffed it and threw it on the floor. "These rags and tatters, how they smell...umph!...throw them out of the window!"

"Saugandhi," shouted Madho.

Saugandhi retorted in a sharper voice, "Saugandhi...Saugandhi...you son of a Saugandhi, what have you come here for?...Am I your mother that I'll give you fifty rupees or do you expect them because you think I am infatuated with your youth?...You dog!...you swine! are you trying to boss over me? Am I your slave or dependent? Get out, you cur! Who do you think you are? I want to know who are you, a thief or a thug? Why have you come to my room at this hour? Shall I call the police? You may not be in a mess in Poona, but I can get you into one right now."

Madho was intimidated. All he could mumble was, "Saugandhi, what has come over you?"

"Who are you to ask? What right have you to put me this question? Get out of this room, or...."

Saugandhi's shouting woke up her mangy dog, who had been sleeping under the bed. He lifted his mouth towards Madho and began to bark. At this development, Saugandhi burst into another fit of hysterical laughter.

Madho took fright. He stopped to pick up his cap, but Saugandhi stormed at him. "Don't you dare touch that...Leave it where it is, I'll send it to you by postal order as soon as I reach Poona...." and doubling up with laughter, she collapsed in the cane chair.

Her dog barked Madho out of the room. When it returned, after chasing Madho all the way down the stairs, it came up to Saugandhi wagging its little stump of a tail, sat down at her feet and began flapping its ears.

This roused Saugandhi,. She found herself surrounded by a terrifying silence. Never before had she experienced this sort of dead stillness in her room. Everything seemed to be empty, like a train that has been shunted into a shed after all its passengers have alighted. She had an uneasy feeling that there was a sort of vacuum sucking at her from within. She tried her best to fill this void somehow, but failed. She would crowd a number of thoughts into her head, but her mind was like a seieve. It remained empty.

For a long time, Saugandhi sat in the cane chair and could think of no way of distracting herself. Suddenly, she picked up her dog and lying down in her spacious bed, went to sleep, with the mange stricken animal in her arms.

connoisseur

AFTER finishing a bottle of country-made whisky, in a dirty third class hotel, we decided to go out and find ourselves a woman who would neutralise the depression caused by the liquor and the atmosphere of our drab surroundings, a woman who would be refined in comparison with the vulgarity of the hotel and delicious in contrast to the tasteless whisky we had drunk.

Emerging from the dingy atmosphere of the hotel, Fakhar said to Masud and me: "The woman should be full of fizz...like fresh soda -- by God, how I want such a woman!"

The soda served to us with the whisky had hardly even fizzled. Perhaps, it was due to the insipidness of our drink that Fakhar now wanted a woman full of fizz. All three of us wanted a woman. Fakhar was out for one full of fizz, I for one who could talk with refinement of things obscene, while Masud wanted a woman without any affection, who would receive here fee and then forget she had made a bargain.

We knew the way to the bazar where we could get women of all types; black, brown, yellow and white. They always stood on the balconies of their apartments, which lined the bazar like a row of trees. These women, heavily painted, looked like ripe fruit, which could be brought down by throwing stones.

But we did not have such women in view. We were looking for those who belonged to the same profession, but practised clandestinely, away from the market, in some respectable locality.

Fakhar had seen more of life than either Masud or I, and was more sure of himself. He stopped a tonga and asked the driver in a significant tone: "We want a ride...Will you take us.

The tongawallah who also seemed to be a man of the world scrutinised us carefully. I squirmed under his gaze. He did not speak, but his eyes seemed to say, "I can't understand what comes over youngmen, after a few drinks?"

Fakhar asked him again, "We want a ride...Will you take us?" and to make himself clearer added, "Have you any... Thing in view?"

Masud and I withdrew. Masud was nervous, "What sort is this Fakhar?... Ask him to be more discreet."

Before I could reply, Fakhar called "Come on chaps!...get into the tonga."

We got into the tonga: I sat next to the driver.

It was past eight on a late December night. The whisky we had drunk had not fortified us against the weather. I felt the cold more than the others, because I was on the front seat and also the weakest, physically. My ears were numb. When the tonga clattered over Dufferin Bridge, I wrapped my muffler around my head to cover my ears and also turned up the collar of my overcoat. The horse was exhaling steam through its nostrils. We three were silent. The tongawallah wrapped in a coarse blanket was also quiet. His face wore the stamp of sobriety. I found this provoking. I turned to Fakhar. "This tongawallah is an unusual one...he doesn't say a word.... He seems to have had a dose of castor oil!"

The tongawallah remained silent.

Fakhar said, "Those who talk too much do little! He has understood what we want...he'll take us to something good."

Masud who was lighting a cigarette, suddenly exclaimed "By God, woman is a good thing!"

I said, "I want less of the woman, more of the thing!"

"And now," said Masud, turning to the tongawallah, "You know what he wants...less of the woman, more of the thing!"

The tongawallah drove on in silence.

My interest in him deepened. He was a well built man of about thirty five, with a tooth-brush moustache. Most of his face was enveloped in the cowl-like fold of one end of the blanket around his head. I turned to Fakhar again and asked "Where is he taking us?"

Fakhar who never worried himself unduly over anything advised, "Don't be impatient...You will soon see."

It was now Masud's turn to enquire "What did the tongawallah offer us?"

"Some mems on Roshanara Road...he said they would suit us."

"Mems!" repeated Masud, and recalling a poem written by a friend of his, declared "Tonight, we shall avenge the wrongs done to our country by the British!... This tongawallah seems to be a man of taste ; he must have read my friend's poem."

We began discussing mems. Masud and I were against them, but Fakhar seemed to have a great preference for them. He said, "Their knowledge is scientific and they run their profession hygienically. The difference between them and Oriental women is the same as that between our reoris and toffee...like their toffee, they are better packed than our sweeties!"

I replied, "You may be right, Fakhar, but I can't tolerate linguistic handicaps on such occasions. In office, I speak to my boss in English; my trousers are English; my tie is English; my shoe is English. I don't mind these things being English, but for God's sake don't make me do that thing, also in English!"

Fakhar forgot his point and laughed. Masud seemed to be in a trance. Perhaps, he was still thinking of how his friend the poet, had avenged the blood-sucking exploitation of his country on the lips of an English woman. He woke up with a start, "I say how long is this tonga going to keep on running?"

The tongawallah suddenly pulled at the reins and stopped . He said to Fakhar, "We 'll have to walk now, sahib."

We got out and followed the tongawallah on foot. He led us into a dimly-lit lane, which was wider than the ones in the old city. On the right, there was a single storied house with chicks covering the doors and windows. The tongawallah lifted the

chick from one of the doors and entered the house. He remained there for some time and then called us in.

The room was pitch dark. I warned Fakhar and Masud, "Mind you don't trip over something?"

We did not move till the tongawallah had brought a smoky lantern from the next room and said, "This way, please." We entered the room and saw two black ugly, squint-eyed women in loose frocks. These were the mems. Trying hard not to laugh, I said to Fakhar, "What delicious toffees!"

One of the mems, whose rouged cheeks looked like an over-baked brick, heard me and sniggered. I laughed and asked with great tenderness, "What is thy name?"

"Lucy." And she sniggered again.

Masud moved forward and asked the other mem. "And yours?"

"Mary."

Fakhar also came forward and inquired "...And what do you do?"

Both became modest. Lucy said archly, "What a thing to ask!" But Mary came to the point at once. "Do you want to stay or go?...Hurry up!...We have to cook..."

Her hands were coated with dough, which she was now rubbing off, powdering the floor white between her feet.

The tongawallah had brought us to the wrong place. Fakhar, Masud and I felt very uncomfortable in the house, but we did not want the women to notice our disappointment. We could not tell them that they did not suit us; that would be hurting their sentiments. A woman whose hands are covered with dough cannot be without feelings!

I paid some compliments to them both. Fakhar did the same. Masud just smiled. Promising that we would be back soon, the three of us slunk out of the house. The tongawallah understood our decision and followed us after a few minutes. Fakhar said to him, "Do you call these mems?"

"That is what the people call them, sahib!" the tongawallah replied, with great composure.

"The people are bloody fools! I thought you had understood what I meant. Now for God's sake take us to a place where we can have fun!"

Masud tried to make our objective clearer. "Take us to a woman who is fresh, refined and knows the art of conversation...we are not tommies, nor sepoys...we are three respectable men, who haven't had a free talk with a woman for a long time...understand?"

The tongawallah nodded his head. "Alright get in...I'll take you to Sadar Bazar."

"Who lives there?" asked Fakhar.

The tongawallah gathered the reins in his hands and said: "A Punjabi girl....many people go to her."

We drove towards the Punjabi girl. On the way, we began to discuss the two black mems because they had been more disappointed than us. I would have given them some money, but that would have been charity. Fakhar did not take much interest in this discussion; he disapproved of it. But Masud and I kept on talking about them, till the tonga pulled up along the pavement in a wide bazar.

The four of us got out, crossed the pavement, mounted the stairs and reached the top of a house. A lavatory without roof or door faced us. We entered a room adjoining it. In the farthest corner of the room sat four men, playing flush. They did not see us enter. A woman, who was standing near them, taking a keen interest in the hands of one of the players saw us, and came towards us.

Here too, we saw a smoky lantern. It was surrounded by the flush players. The woman walked up to Fakhar and stood with one hand on her hip. For a moment I could see nothing of her except her large breasts, indecently drawn out by her tight dress, their nipples straining against the cloth. She was about thirtyfive years old. Her narrow forehead had a small crescent tattooed on it. She looked at Masud and smiled, and I noticed two gold

points in her teeth. She was a dangerous woman; the action of her mouth reminded me of a fruit-crusher.

She winked at Fakhar and asked, "Can I do anything for you?" Fakhar questioned her timidly "What's your name?"

She looked at us in turn and replied, "Gulzar."

Fakhar recovered his wits. "We are in the wrong house; we want Gulab...please forgive us."

She snatched the cigarette from Fakhar's hand and pulling at it deeply, walked back to the flush players, who were still unaware of our presence.

We came out of the house and again explained to the tongawallah the type of woman we wanted "Please tell me briefly, what you really want?" I got fed up and appealed to Fakhar.

Fakhar pleaded with the tongawallah. "Look, take us to a woman...a girl who is not more than sixteen or seventeen...understand?"

The tongawallah rearranged the blanket around himself, caught the reins, and said, "Why didn't you say so in the beginning...come, I'll take you to the right place now."

After half an hour's jolting in the tonga, we again came to a stop. God knows what bazar it was!.....We went up to a room on the second storey of a house.

The door was covered with a dirty sack. We saw an oldish peasant woman stoking up a fire in the kitchen. Near her was a flat earthenware utensil, containing some dough. There was so much smoke in the place that our eyes began to water as we entered.

The woman arranged some firewood in the lower grate and turning to the tongawallah said in an uncouth rural accent, "Take them inside."

The tongawallah led us through the kitchen into the next room. It was dark. He struck a match, located a lantern, lit it and went out of the room. I looked round. There was a big bed in the corner; its posts coloured bright red. The bedsheet was

embroidered with large bright coloured flowers, but was dirty and stained. On the shelf, along the wall next to the bed, lay a greasy bottle of oil and a wooden comb. Under the bed was a battered trunk, and on the trunk lay a pair of black shoes.

Masud and Fakhar sat on the bed. I preferred to stand. A short girl entered the room, trying to drape a *dupata*, twice her size around her. Masud and Fakhar stood up. When she came under the lantern, I saw that she was not more than fourteen years old. Her breasts were no bigger than peaches, but her face had matured far in advance of her body...it seemed even more seasoned than that of her mother, who was kindling a fire in the kitchen. Her nostrils were quivering and one of her hands was clenched tightly like a dishonest shop-keepers, about to tamper with scales. It seemed we would never get a fair bargain out of her.

The three of us stared at her in astonishment. Fakhar was feeling embarrassed. Masud's romantic nature had probably flowed into his finger-tips; he was biting them furiously.

I looked at the girl again, as if I could not believe my eyes. She was a pigmy of a girl, trying to adjust a big *dupata* around herself. Her dark-brown complexion seemed dirty and dull. She was anaemic. She looked like a train which has had a very fast run, but has been pulled up now, its brakes clamped on and left in the open, its paint fading and peeling off. Her feminine qualities were blunted. She had not even the crude appeal of the most ungainly of girls of her age. In spite of her clothes she seemed naked; indecently and repulsively naked. The lower half of her figure was definitely not in the feminine mould. I was about to say something to her, when an old man, a very old man, with a white beard entered the room, his head nodding with age. The girl said something to him in a dialect I could not fully understand; but I made out that the old man was her maternal grandfather.

The three of us literally ran out of the house. When we reached the bazar we felt better. The sight of the old man tottering on his legs and the facial maturity of his underdeveloped grand daughter had revolted us; it had been a shock to our ideal of refinement. We did not say a word to each other for a long time.

Fakhar paced up and down near the tonga. Masud retired into a dark corner and eased himself. I stood with my hands in my overcoat and looked at the sky, where the quarter-moon resembled the pale prostitute, whose figure was only half -- feminine. The moon was trying to drape a cloud around itself, like the girl's dupatta. A little way off was a small star, nodding like the old man's head.

I felt goose-pimples all over my body. It was almost a quarter of an hour before the tongawallah came down the stairs of the house. He approached Fakhar and said, "You took the tonga at eight, It's eleven now...give me my fare for three hours."

Without a word, Fakhar handed him two rupees. With the money in his fist, the tongawallah smiled, "Babuji, you won't find another like her in the city...Well, you are your own judge...Get into the tonga. I shall be back in a minute."

But he did not have to trouble going up the stairs; the old man had followed him and now stood near the drain, his feeble head nodding. The tongawallah gave him the two rupees and returned. His earlier restraint had vanished. He took up the reins, clicked his tongue, and said to the horse." Come on, my son," and suddenly burst into a song in his rugged bass:

The Joys of Spring are here,

La - La.....La - La!

babu gopinath

I met Babu Gopinath in 1940. At that time I was editing a weekly in Bombay. I was writing the leader, when Abdur Rahim Sandow entered my office, ushering in a short statured person. Sandow shouted a greeting at me in his characteristic manner and introduced me to his companion: "Manto sahib, meet Babu Gopinath."

I got up and shook hands with him. As usual, Sandow began to shower me with compliments. "Babu Gopinath, you are shaking hands with the country's Number One writer. He writes and *Dharan takhta!* He treats people so *continutely* that he even purges the soul! What was that little pun you made the other day about Miss Khurshid being seen in a car and somebody being incarnate...? Well, Babu Gopinath, isn't it *anti ki panti po*?

Abdur Rahim Sandow was unique in his manner of speech. *Continutely, dharan takhta, anti ki panti po* were sound effects of his own invention. He introduced them into the flow of his conversation as freely as words, which could not adequately meet the demands of his expression. Babu Gopinath seemed very much impressed by Sandow's account of my accomplishments. Sandow continued,"...and this is Babu Gopinath, a rake, a wrecker of homes, usually his own, always making an ass of himself, has been getting into one mess after another all the way from Lahore to Bombay. He has a Kashmiri pigeon with him."

Babu Gopinath smiled.

Abdur Rahim Sandow thought the introduction incomplete. "If anyone can claim to be Number One among fools, it is he. People butter him and touch him for money. I only gab and he provides me with two packets of Polson's Butter every day. Really, Manto sahib, he's a very *antiphilogistine* sort of person. You must come to his flat this evening."

Babu Gopinath, who had been preoccupied--God knows what he was thinking about--started and said "Yes, yes, Manto sahib, you must come." Turning to Sandow, he asked, "Sandow, does he indulge?"

Abdur Rahim Sandow burst into a loud guffaw, "Yes sir, he indulges in everything! Manto sahib, you must come this evening. I have also started drinking because its free."

Sandow gave me the address, at which I arrived as promised at about six. It was a neat and clean three-roomed flat. The furniture was brand new. Besides Sandow and Babu Gopinath there were two other men and two women. Sandow introduced me to them.

One was Ghaffar Sahin. *Tehmad* clad, witth a necklace of big beads, he was a typical Punjabi sahin. About him Sandow said, "He is Babu Gopinath's conscience keeper! You know what I mean? In the Punjab, any person whose nose is always running and who drools at the mouth can become a *dirvish* and be considered very near god. Ghaffar is also near God; at least, he is getting closer. He has come from Lahore with Babu Gopinath, because, there he could not hope to find another sucker. Here he smokes Babu sahib's Craven 'A' cigarettes and drinks his Scotch and prays for the salvation of all...."

Ghaffar Sahin smiled at this introduction.

Sandow turned to Ghulam Ali, a tall, well built, pock-marked young man. "He is my protege... follows in my footsteps. The daughter of a well known prostitute of Lahore fell in love with him and tried many a *continutely* to ensnare him, but he said, "Do or die, I'll not hang up my loin cloth! He met Babu Gopinath while smoking *charas* at one of those semi-fake shrines and since then has stuck to him like a limpet. He boards with Babu Gopinath and gets a tin of Craven`A' every day.

Ghulam Ali also began to smile.

One of the women had a round face and a milk and roses complexion. As soon as I entered the room, I knew that this was the Kashmir pigeon mentioned by Sandow in my office. She was neat and clean. Her hair was short, as if bobbed, but this was not so. It was naturally short. Her gleaming eyes were clear. The

features and lines of her face indicated her inexperience and iack of guile. Introducing me to her, Sandow said, "Zeenat Begum, affectionately called Zeeno by Babu Gopinath. A sly procuress plucked this apple in Kashmir and brought it to Lahore. Babu Gopinath learnt about her through his own C.I.D and made off with her one night. There was a law suit. The police had fun for about two months. At last Babu Sahib won the case and brought her here...*dharan takhta!"*

The other woman, dark complexioned, quietly smoked a cigarette. Her eyes were red and immodest. Babu Gopinath pointed at her and said, "Say something about her, too."

Sandow slapped the woman's thigh and said, "This, sir, is *Teen Patoti. Fil Fil Foti,* Mrs Abdur Rahim Sandow alias Sardar Begum .... She is also a product of Lahore. She fell in love with me in `36. Within two years she reduced me to *dharan takhta!* I ran away from Lahore. Babu Gopinath sent for her to cheer me up. She also gets a daily ration of a tin of Craven `A'. Every evening she takes a morphia injection, costing two rupees eight annas. She's dark, but otherwise she's a very *tit for tat* woman."

She simply said, "Don't talk rot." She spoke with the habitual coquetry of a woman of the profession.

Sandow then began an eulogistic introduction of myself, but I cut him short. "That's enough, friend. Let's talk about something else."

Sandow yelled, "Boy, whisky and soda... Babu Gopinath, come on, air a greenback."

Babu Gopinath drew out a wad of currecny notes from his pocket and handed one to Sandow who looked at the note intently and then suddenly rumbled, "Oh God! Oh my Rab-ul-Almeen! When will that day come when I too will lick my thumb and peel off notes? Ghulam Ali, my brother, go and get two bottles of Johnny Walker still going strong."

The bottles came and we all began to drink. This continued for two or three hours, during which the irrepressible Abdur Rahim did most of the talking. He gulped down his first glass in one draught and shouted, "*Dharan Takhta*, Manto sahib, this is just what whisky should be like. It has gone down the gullet

branding my insides with slogans of *`Long live the Revolution'*.... Long live Babu Gopinath!"

Poor Babu Gopinath remained silent. At times he would express his agreement with what Sandow said. He gave me the impression of having no will of his own. He would agree with whatever anyone said. He had no confidence in himself and Ghaffar Sahin, his conscience keeper was living proof of this. Sandow really meant that Babu Gopinath had faith in Ghaffar Sahin. From the conversation, I gathered that in Lahore, Babu Gopinath spent most of his time in the company of pirs, faqirs or prostitutes. I made particular note of his air of absent -- mindedness, as if he were thinking of something not of the moment.

I asked him, "Babu Gopinath, what are you thinking about?"

He gave a start, "Who me?...I...I...nothing." He began to smile and looked lovingly at Zeenat. "I am thinking about these beauties...what else would I think about?"

Sandow said, "Manto sahib he's an incorrigible wrecker of homes. There isn't a prostitute in Lahore who has not been *continutely* with Babu sahib."

At this Babu Gopinath said with a crude affectation of modesty. "Manto sahib, I am now no longer the man I used to be...the stamina's gone."

After this the conversation drifted into vulgar and obscene channels. Remarks were passed about the well-known brothels in Lahore; about whores who now ran establishments of their own, about girls, who were *Natnis* and what Babu Gopinath had paid for a virgin at her nose-ring removal ceremony. This conversation was confined to Sardar, Sandow, Ghaffar Sahin and Ghulam Ali. It was carried on in the slang of Lahore's red light area. I could follow the trend of the conversation, but some of the terms were beyond me.

Zeenat remained silent throughout. At times she smiled at what was being said, but I felt that she had no interest in the conversation. She sipped her glass of whisky, a weak drink with a lot of soda, without any relish. She smoked as if she had no liking for tobacco, but it was surprising that she smoked the

largest number of cigarettes. Did she love Babu Gopinath? Nothing she did gave any clue to her feelings for him. It was obvious, however, that Babu Gopinath took great pains for her and provided for her every comfort. I felt that there was a strange restraint between them. I mean, they seemed to keep a certain distance, instead of being close to each other.

At about eight, Sardar went to Dr. Majid for her morphia injection. Ghaffar Sahin picked up his rosary and dozed off on the carpet. Ghulam Ali was sent to get food from a hotel. When Sandow paused in his interesting chatter, Babu Gopinath, who was now tipsy cast another of his amorous glances at Zeenat and said, "Manto sahib, what do you think of my Zeenat."

I wondered what to say. I looked at Zeenat and she cast her eyes down. I said, "I think she's a good girl."

Babu Gopinath was pleased, "Manto sahib, she is really a very good girl. By God, she is not fond of jewellery or anything else. Many a time, I have said, "My life, shall I buy you a house." Do you know her reply? `What will I do with a house -- I have no near one'.....Manto sahib, how much would a car cost?"

"I don't know."

Babu Gopinath was surprised. "What are you saying, Manto sahib?....You not knowing car prices. Come with me, tomorrow, we'll buy a car for Zeeno. I feel that a car is a necessity in Bombay."

There was no reaction on Zeenat's face.

After some time, Babu Gopinath's inebriation increased. Abruptly, he turned to me and with great emotion said: "Manto sahib, you are very learned....I'm an utter ass. Tell me what can I do for you. Yesterday, Sandow happened to mention you. I at once sent for a taxi and said, "Take me to Manto sahib.... If I have offended you in any way, please forgive me.... I am a very sinful person....Shall I send for some more whisky?"

"No....No....I've had enough."

He became more maudlin, "Have some more drinks, Manto sahib." He drew the wad of hundred rupee notes from his pocket and was going to detach one when I took all the notes away from

him and thrust them back into his pocket "You gave a hundred to Ghulam Ali....what became of it?"

I had begun to feel sorry for Babu Gopinath who was being bled by so many human leeches. I had thought Babu Gopinath to be an utter ass, but he took the hint and smiled. "Manto sahib, the change from that note either dropped out of Ghulam Ali's pocket or....."

Babu Gopinath had not completed the sentence when Ghulam Ali entered the room and in great distress told us that some bastard in the hotel had picked his pocket. Babu Gopinath smiled at me and handed Ghulam Ali another hundred rupee note, saying, "Hurry up with the food."

I did not discover the real Babu Gopinath until after about half a dozen meetings. It is perhaps impossible for anyone to know another person thoroughly but I found out a number of things about Babu Gopinath which were very interesting. First I wish to say that my original impression that he was a simpleton turned out to be wrong. He was fully conscious that Sandow, Sardar and Ghulam Ali, who were pretending to be his friends, were just self-seekers. He suffered abuse and scoldings from them, but did not take offence.

He said to me, "Manto sahib, I have never turned down any advice. Whenever someone gives me counsel, I say, Subhanallah! They think I am a fool, perhaps, I am...but I consider them clever for, at least, they have sense enough to discover that foolishness in me, from which they can profit. The fact is that I have always kept company with pirs, pimps and prostitutes. I have come to have some sort of affection for them. I cannot live without them. I have decided that when I run through my money, I'll spend the rest of my days at a shrine. Whore houses and the tombs of pirs....they are the two places where I find peace of mind. I shall soon have to give up whores as my money will not last for long. There are thousands of pirs buried in our country. I shall go to the shrine of any one of them."

I asked him, "Why do you like whore houses and shrines?" .....After some deliberation, he said, "Because there is nothing

but sham and deceit in these places. For self deception there can be no better environment."

I asked him another question, "Are you fond of listening to singing girls...do you have any taste for music?"

He replied, "Not the slightest and I am glad it is so, because it enables me to nod my head in appreciation even when the singing is bad...music does not interest me, Manto sahib, but I feel great pleasure in taking out a ten or hundred rupee note and baiting the singing girl...wave a note at her and she'll rise, make a bow and come over to receive it. She approaches and I fold the note into my stocking and it gives me great pleasure when she bends down to extricate it. These and other equally silly tricks give great pleasure to the debauched....Who doesn't know that in whore houses parents prostitute their daughters and in shrines *pirs* do the same with their God."

I do not know much about Babu Gopinath's family tree, but I came to learn that he was the son of an exceptionally tight-fisted money-lender. On the death of his father, he inherited property worth about a million rupees, which he began to squander at will. When he came to Bombay he brought about fifty thousand rupees with him. Those were the days of low prices but even then he spent over a hundred rupees a day. He bought a new Fiat for his Zeeno. I do not remember exactly, but I think it cost about three thousand rupees. A chauffeur was engaged. He was a villain. Babu Gopinath seemed to have a liking for such characters.

We began to meet more often. I was merely interested in Babu Gopinath as a character, but he treated me with a deference he did not show to others.

One evening, I was greatly surprised to find Shafiq at Babu Gopinath's flat. Perhaps, if I say Mohammed Shafiq Tusi the name may have a familiar ring. He had quite a reputation as a singer with an original style and as a wit and humourist. Most people knew nothing about one aspect of his life; that before living with three real sisters one after the other, for three or four years each, he had had relations with their mother. Little known also was the fact that he did not like his wife, who died shortly after marriage, because she did not have a singing girl's

coquetry. Even those who were slightly acquainted with Shafiq Tusi knew that during his forty years (that was his age at that time) he had been kept by hundreds of prostitutes, at whose expense he dressed extremely well, lived well, drove about in expensive cars, but never spent a pie of his own on any one of them.

For women, especially singing girls and prostitutes his easy going way and his jokes, which were flavoured with the ribald humour of mirasis had great fascination. Women were drawn to him without much effort on his part.

When I saw him talking pleasantly and laughing with Zeenat, I was not surprised. I only wondered how he had suddenly appeared on the scene. Sandow was the only person I could think of, who could have brought him here, but the two had not been on speaking terms for quite some time. I learnt later that it was through Sandow that he came to be introduced. There had been a reconciliation between the two.

Babu Gopinath sat aside, puffing at a hokkah, I have perhaps, not mentioned before that he never smoked cigarettes. Mohammaed Shafiq Tusi was telling ribald mirasi stories, in which Zeenat took some and Sardar considerable interest. Shafiq saw me and said, "Bismillah! do you also pass through this valley?"

Sandow exclaimed, *"Dharan takhta!* Here comes Israel sahib." I knew what he meant.

He gossiped for some time. I noted that Zeenat and Shafiq exchanged glances that were more than mere looks. Zeenat was a novice at the game, but Shafiq's mastery made up for her rawness. Sardar watched their ocular exchanges like a coach by the ring-side, observing every move of cub wrestlers.

Since our first meeting, I had become quite informal with Zeenat. She called me brother and I did not mind it. She was friendly and naive, spoke little and was always trim and tidy.

I did not like her making eyes at Shafiq. In the first place her efforts were clumsy and then...well, let me put it this way, I felt that her calling me brother entailed certain responsibilities. Shafiq and Sandow went out of the room. I asked her, perhaps,

too severely, about her ocular exchanges with Shafiq, for big tears suddenly welled up in her eyes and crying, she left the room.

Babu Gopinath left his hokkah and hastily followed her. Sardar's eyes flashed a message at him, which I did not follow. After some time, Babu Gopinath emerged from the inner room and saying, "Come, Manto Sahib," took me into the room.

Zeenat was sitting on the bed. When I entered, she hid her face in her hands and laid herself on the bed. Babu Gopinath began to speak with great seriousness, "Manto sahib, I am very much in love with this woman. She has been with me for two years. I can swear by Hazrat Ghaus-e-Azam Gilani that she has never given me any cause for complaint. Her sisters...I mean, other women in the profession have always behaved like gold-diggers and swindled me right and left. She has never taken a pie more than was her due. If I stayed away for weeks with some other woman, she pawned some jewellery to meet the day to day expenses. As I have told you before, I shall soon retire from this life. My wealth will not last long. I don't wish to ruin her. In Lahore, I frequently pleaded with her that she should study the methods of other prostitutes and learn from them, she should do what the others did. I am rich today but tomorrow I shall have to be a beggar. In careers like hers one rich man is not enough. She will not be able to get along if she can't entice other rich men. But Manto sahib, she has not paid any heed to my advice. All the time she stays at home like a respectable matron. I consulted Ghaffar Sahin, who suggested that I should bring her to Bombay. I knew he made this suggestion, because two prostitutes whom he knew had got into films in bombay, but I accepted the proposal. It's two months since she came here. Sardar was asked to come from Lahore to teach her all the tricks. She can also learn a lot from Ghaffar Sahin. Nobody knows me here. She did not want me to be humiliated. I have told her not to bother about me. Bombay is a big city with thousands of rich men. I have given her a car. She should look for a suitable person....Manto sahib, I swear by God that it is my heart's desire to see her on her own, to see her worldly wise. I am prepared to open a bank account for her with ten thousand rupees right away, but I know that within ten days Sardar, who is sitting in the other room, will manage to pocket

every pie of that money. You should also urge her to try to become more alert. Since the car was brought Sardar takes Zeeno out for a drive every evening to Apollo Bunder. So far this has not borne any fruit. Sandow with great difficulty today brought Mohammed Shafiq here...what's your opinion of him?"

I did not think it proper to express my opinion. Babu Gopinath himself said, "He seems to be quite well to do and he's handsome...Zenno Jani do you like him?"

Zeeno remained silent.

On learning from Babu Gopinath the real purpose of bringing Zeenat to Bombay, I felt a bit dizzy. I could hardly believe that such a thing was possible. But, later events dispelled my doubts and bewilderment. It really was Babu Gopinath's desire that Zeenat should become the mistress of some wealthy person in Bombay or should become artful enough to be able to extort money from a number of men.

If Babu Gopinath had just wanted to get rid of Zeenat, it would not have been a difficult thing to manage. It could have been arranged in a day. Because his Zeenat was a good woman, Babu Gopinath tried his utmost to ensure a good future for her. He tried to get her into films and gave parties to many fake directors. He even rented a telephone, but nothing turned out right.

Muhammad Shafiq Tusi's visits lasted about a month and a half. He spent several nights with Zeenat, but he was not the type who would ever keep a woman. One day, Babu Gopinath said with a feeling of regret and sorrow. "Shafiq turned out to be a mere gentleman. Look at his style. From poor Zeenat he took four bedsheets, six pillow cases and two hundred rupees cash. I hear he is now carrying on with a girl called Almas."

This was quite true. Almas was the youngest daughter of Nazir Jan of Patiala. Before her he had been connected with her three sisters. The two hundred rupees he had taken from Zeenat were spent on Almas, who had swallowed some poison after a quarrel with her sisters.

When Muhammad Shafiq Tusi stopped his visits to Zeenat she phoned me several times and asked me to find him and bring

him to her. I tried to trace him, but no one knew where he lived. One day I came across him at the Radio Station. He seemed greatly agitated. When I told him that Zeenat wanted to see him, he replied, "I have had that message from others also. I'm sorry, I'm very busy these days. Zeenat's a good girl but its a pity she's so prudish...I've no interest in women who live and behave like wives."

Disappointed with Shafiq, Zeenat resumed her outing to Apollo Bunder with Sardar. In fifteen days, and after consuming gallons of petrol, Sardar managed to entice two men. Zeenat got four hundred rupees from them. Babu Gopinath thought the situation hopeful because one of these men, who owned a silk mill, had told Zeenat that he would marry her. He never came to see Zeenat again.

One day I was passing through Hornby Road, when I saw Zeenat's car parked along the pavement. On the rear seat I saw Muhammad Yasin, who owned Nagina Hotel. I asked him, "Where did you get this car?"

Yasin smiled, "You know the girl who owns it."

I said, "Yes, I know her."

"Well, then, think out for yourself how I came by it...she's a good girl" He winked at me and I smiled back.

Four days later, Babu Gopinath came to my office in a taxi. I learnt from him how Zeenat came to know Yasin. One evening, Sardar and Zeenat picked up some one at Apollo Bunder and went to Nagina Hotel with him. He, however, left them after a quarrel, but this led to Zeenat meeting the owner of the hotel.

Babu Gopinath was hopeful because within ten or fifteen days of friendship, Yasin had given Zeenat six fine and costly *sarees* as presents. Babu Gopinath was now planning to return to Lahore after some time, during which he expected the friendship between Zeenat and Yasin to ripen into something more lasting...But this did not materialise.

A Christian woman took a room in Nagina Hotel. Her daughter, Muriel set her cap at Yasin, who fell for her. While poor Zeenat stayed behind at the hotel, Yasin drove Muriel about in the car.

Babu Gopinath was very hurt when he came to know of this. He said to me, "Manto sahib, what sort of people are these? If they tire of a thing they should be frank about it. But Zeenat is strange. She knows fully well what is going on but cannot bring herself to say even this. `My dear, Sir, if you want to make love to that Christian girl why use my car,....What should I do, Manto sahib, she is a very good but unassertive girl....I can't understand anything....She should be a bit cunning.

Zeenat did not feel at all hurt at the severance of her relations with Yasin.

For several days there was no new development. Then, on my phoning Babu Gopinath's flat one day, I was told that he, along with Ghulam Ali and Ghaffar Sahin, had gone to Lahore for money. He had gone through the fifty thousand he had brought with him to Bombay. Before leaving he had told Zeenat that he would be away for several days as he would have to sell some of his estate.

Sardar needed her morphia injections; Sandow his Polson Butter. Both made joint efforts and managed to bring two or three men home every day. Zeenat was told that Babu Gopinath would not return and that she should fend for herself. The daily take amounted to about a hundred or a hundred and twenty five rupees, of which Zeenat received only half. Sandow and Sardar appropriated the rest.

One day, I said to Zeenat, "What are you doing?"

She said, very naively, "Bhaijan, I don't know. I agree to whatever these people say."

I wanted to spend some time with her and show her that what she was doing was not right; that Sandow and Sardar were using her for their selfish ends; that they would even sell her outright, but I said nothing. Zeenat was an exasperatingly stupid, unambitious and lifeless woman. This unfortunate woman had no consideration for herself. She sold her body and should have had some of the ways of others who did the same. She had no interest in cigarettes, drinks, food, home, telephone or even the sofa on which she often reclined.

Babu Gopinath returned after a full one month. He went to Rahim but found the flat occupied by someone else. On Sandow's and Sardar's advice Zeenat had moved to the upper storey of a bungalow in Bandra. Babu Gopinath came to me and I gave him the full address. He asked me about Zeenat I told him as much as I could, without mentioning how Sandow and Sardar were using her.

Babu Gopinath had brought with him ten thousand rupees, which he had managed to secure with great difficulty. He had left Ghulam Ali and Ghaffar Sahin in Lahore. The taxi waiting outside, Babu Gopinath insisted that I should accompany him.

We reached Bandra in about an hour. The taxi was going to Pali Hill when on the narrow road we saw Sandow. Babu Gopinath shouted, "Sandow."

When Sandow saw Babu Gopinath, the only words he could utter were, *Dharn takhta!"*

Babu Gopinath asked him to get into the taxi and accompany us, but Sandow said, "I wish to talk to you in private."

The taxi was taken off the main road and Babu Gopinath got out. Sandow took him aside and they talked for some time. Babu Gopinath returned to the taxi alone and said to the driver, "Take us back."

Babu Gopinath was happy. When we reached Dadar, he said, "Manto sahib, Zeeno is about to be married."

Astonished, I asked, "To whom?"

Babu Gopinath replied, "He is a wealthy zamindar from Hyderabad Sind. It's fortunate that I have arrived in time. The money I have with me will make it possible for me to give Zeeno a dowry...What do you think?"

I was at a loss to say anything. I was wondering who this wealthy *zamindar* from Hyderabad, Sind was. Was this a plot engineered by Sandow and Sardar? But it was confirmed later that he really was a well-to-do *zamindar* from Hyderabad, Sind who was introduced to Zeenat by her music teacher, who also came from Hyderabad, Sind. The music teacher used to try in vain to give lessons to Zeenat. One day he broght with him his

patron Ghulam Hussain, which was the name of the wealthy zamindar from Hyderabad, Sind. Zeenat was very hospitable to him. At the earnest request of Ghulam Hussain, she sang a ghazal by Ghalib. He fell head over heels in love with her. The music teacher told Zeenat about his feelings. Sardar and Sandow together settled the matter and the match was arranged.

Babu Gopinath was happy. Once he went to see Zeenat as a friend of Sandow's. He met Ghulam Hussain and his happiness increased two-fold. He said to me, "Manto sahib, he is a young, handsome and very intelligent person.... My prayer at the shrine of Hazur Data Ganj Bakhsh, before leaving Lahore, has been answered ... May Bhagwan keep them both happy!."

Babu Gopinath made arrangements for Zeenat's wedding with great eagerness and interest. He spent two thousand rupees on jewellery, two thousand on her trousseau and gave her a cash gift of five thousand rupees.

Muhammad Shafiq Tusi, Muhammad Yasin, Sandow, the music teacher, myself and Babu Gopinath attended the wedding. Sandow represented the bride.

When the acceptance was announced. Sandow exclaimed *"Dharan takhta!"*

Ghulam Hussain was in a blue serge suit and smiled happily as everyone congratulated him. He was a well built person, beside whom Babu Gopinath looked like a partridge.

Babu Gopinath had procured all that was necessary for the wedding feast. After the guests had finished eating he himself helped them wash their hands. When I went to wash mine, he spoke to me pleadingly like a child, " Manto sahib, please go inside and see how Zeeno looks in the bridal dress."

I lifted the screen and went inside. Zeenat wore a red brocade *shalwar* and *kamiz*. Her *dupatta* was of the same colour, with a border of gold thread. Her face was lightly made up. Although I intensely dislike lipstick, Zeenat's painted lips looked nice. She looked very pretty when she blushed and salamed me. But, when I saw the bed in the corner covered with flowers, I laughed out involuntarily. I said to Zeenat, "Wha's this farce?

Zeenat looked at me like an innocent pigeon. "You are making fun of me, Bhaijan." She said this and her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

I had not yet realised my *faux pas* when Babu Gopinath entered the room. With great tenderness he wiped Zeenat's eyes with his handkerchief and said to me in a hurt tone, "Manto sahib, I thought you were intelligent and understanding...You should have thought twice before making fun of Zeeno.

His tone showed that his confidence in me was shaken. Before I could offer my apologies he stroked Zeenat's head with his hand and choking with emotion said 'May God always keep you happy."

After that Babu Gopinath looked at me. His eyes were moist, they were full of reproach, deep reproach. He then turned away and left the room.

nothing but the truth

I swear by God...Recite the *Kalima*...,There is but one God and Muhammad is His Messenger... You are Muslims, believe what I say...I'll speak nothing but the truth...Pakistan has nothing to do with this...I can lay down my life for Quaid-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. but I swear by God that Pakistan has nothing to do with this.

Please don't rush matters...I know these are the days of riots and disturbances, and that you have little time to spare, but for God's sake hear me out...Let me tell you my story...I don't deny having killed Tukaram...as you say I've ripped open his belly with my sharp knife...but I did'nt do that because he was Hindu. Now you'll want to ask me why I killed him...Well then, I'll tell you the whole story.

I swear to tell you the truth and nothing but the truth!...I'll recite the Kalima...There is but one God and Muhammad is His Messenger!...I'd be an infidel if I had known I'd get into this mess. In the last Hindu-Muslim riots, I killed three Hindus, but believe me those killings were quite another matter; not in the least like this one...I'll tell you all about it and why I killed Tukaram.

Well, sahib, what do you think of women?...I think the elders were right... My God save us from the wiles of women .... If I escape the gallows, I swear I shall never again go anywhere near a woman...woman...the moment I see one I fall for her.... All of us have to die some day and render account to Allah...I swear by Him...Inspector sahib, the honest truth is that when I saw Rukma, I fell for her at once.

Of course, anyone has the right to say to me, "My man, with your salary of thirty five rupees a month, what have you to do with women; why don't you make your rent collections and be on your way?" But sahib, that is just how the whole thing

started. One day I went to flat number sixteen in my tenement to ask for the rent. I knocked on the door and out came Rukma Bai. I had seen her several times before, but that day the damned woman had smeared herself with oil...all over her body...and wraped a flimsy *dhoti* round herself...I don't know what happened to me...I wanted to take off her dhoti and start massaging her. That, sahib, was the beginning and soon I had lost my heart, my mind, my everything to her.

What a woman!...Her body was like stone...I bruised my hands massaging her...so hard did I knead her, but she...I wonder who fathered her...all she said was "Go on, a little harder."

Married? Yes, sahib, she was not only married, but as Khan, the *chowkidar*, said, she even had a lover...Of course, since I am giving you the full story...the paramours etc, will all figure in it.

Yes, sahib, from that day, I was madly in love. She knew how I felt, because sometimes she looked at me through the corner of her eye and smiled...but God is my witness...whenever she smiled a cold tremor ran down my spine. At first I thought that that was *the* reaction...the standard reaction in the presence of the beloved, but, later, I found out...wait, I'll start from the beginning.

I have already told you that Rukma and I had made eyes at each other. Day and night I thought of nothing else, but how to get her. That damned husband of her's was always in their one room flat, making wooden toys...I just never got a chance.

One day I saw her husband in the bazar...what was his name?...God bless you...Oh yes ! it was Girdhari...I saw him in the bazar selling his wooden toys. At once I made a bee-line for flat number sixteen! With a thumping heart, I knocked on the door. It opened and there stood Rukma, glaring at me. I swear by God, my nerve almost failed me...In fact it did. I was about to turn tail when she smiled and beckoned me in.

When I had entered, she closed the door and said, "Sit down." I sat down. She came up to me and said, "I know what you are after, but let me tell you that so long as Girdhari is alive, you won't get what you want."

I stood up. Seeing her so near me had set my blood boiling and I could hear it bubbling in my temples. The damned woman had again used oil on her body and was wearing that same flimsy *dhoti!* I gripped her by the arms, drew her into a firm embrace and said, "I don't know what you are saying." My word, what muscles she had...I can't describe to you, sahib, the sort of woman she was. I wont' try...I'll go on with the story.

I became more passionate and crushed her against my chest "Girdhari can go to hell," I said , "but you'll have to be mine."

Rukma pushed me away and said, "Mind the oil will spoil your clothes." I said, "So what," and again clasped her to my breast. Believe me, sahib, if anyone had taken up a whip and lashed my back to sherds, I wouldn't have released her, but that damned woman started purring... and had soon coaxed me back to my seat. I sat there without saying a word. I could not guess what she had in mind...that sala Girdhari was out...what was she afraid of ? After some time, I could no longer hold my tongue. "Rukma", I said, "we'll never get such a good opportunity again."

Very lovingly, she stroked my hair, smiled and said,"We'll get an even better opportunity...but tell me, will you do what I ask you to do?" At that time, sahib, I was not myself, I was out of my mind...as if the very devil had taken possession of me. I burst out, with great bravado. "I'm ready to kill fifteen men for your sake." She smiled and said, "I can quite believe you." Again, my spirit wavered, but I thought it was due to excess of passion.

I sat there for some time more, talked of love and things of that sort; had some of the curry cooked by her and left very tamely. I didn't get anywhere with her...you know what I mean...but, sahib, you can't really get away with that on the very first day. I thought: some other time.

Ten days went by. On the eleventh day...at two at night, it was about that time...when someone woke me up softly and gently....I sleep at the foot of the stairs...I rubbed my eyes and who do you think it was?...Rukma ! My heart again had that sinking feeling. I asked, almost in a whisper, "What 's it?" She replied, "Come with me." Barefooted, I followed her. We

reached her room and entered it. The room was in pitch darkness. I didn't give the matter much thought and forthwith put my arms around her. She whispered into my ear, "Wait a little." She switched on the light and I started blinking my smarting eyes. Then I saw someone asleep on the matting on the floor, with a cloth covering the face. I made a sign, meaning, "who's this?" Rukma replied, "Sit down," and I sat down...like an owl. She stroked my hair very lovingly and said something that I could not believe...It scared me out of my wits..I broke out in a cold sweat...the blood seemed to have drained away from my body; had I cut it not a drop of blood would have flowed out...can you guess what Rukma had said to me?

Recite the Kalima...there is but one God and Muhammad is His messanger...I am telling you the absolute truth...I've never seen a woman like her...She smiled and casually said,, "I've killed Gidhari." Believe me, sahib, she had, with her own hands, murdered a strong-well built man...what a woman ! By god, sahib, whenever I think of that night, I still have goose-pimples running all over my body...she showed me the thing with which she had strangled girdhari...it was a short length of hime made wire-rope looped round a stick, which she had used as a screw to tighten the noose...so much that the poor devil's tongue was protruding out of his mouth and his eyes popping out of teir sockets. She said she had done it all in the twinkling of an eye.

She lifted the cloth and showed me Girdhari's face...my blood, no...even the marrow in my bones froze at the sight, but that woman; she did'nt turn a hair. I've never even heard of the like of her...She lay down, not far from the corpse and there I was beside her. I felt I had turned impotent for life, but, sahib, I had reckoned without her...she did something to me, something so very unexpected and unfamiliar that all at once the whole of my body came to life...I'll never forget that night...what a night and what a woman...There was the corpse, only a couple of yards away from us, but we were entwined together, quite unaware of its presence.

In the morning, Rukma and I cut Girdhari into three pieces. His tools were in the room, so that was easily managed. We made some noise, but people must have thought that Girdhari was at work, making toys...You'll want to know why I participated in

such a grisly and sinful affair; why I did'nt report the matter to the police...The fact, sahib, is that in one night that damned woman had enslaved me for life. If she had asked me I might even have murdered fifteen men for her sake...You remember I had once boasted to her about that?

Now the problem was how to get rid of the body. After all Rukma was a woman and I could not expect her to do the job. I said to her, "My dear, don't you worry. For the time being, we'll put the pieces in a trunk. At night I'll carry it away"...Strange are the ways of God! That very day riots broke out and the Government had to impose a thirty six hour curfew in the five or six localities that were affected. I said to myself, "Abdul Karim, whatever happens you must get rid of the body tonight"...At two o'clock that night I got up and brought down the trunk. God have mercy, it was heavy ! But I managed to carry it, the weight did'nt bother me but I was afraid of running into a yellow turban...you know, sahib, that's how some people describe your constables...the curfew was on and I would have been arrested for contravening it. But, sahib, God chose to be with me that night and there was no one in the bazar I had to cross...quite near the bazar, I saw a tiny little mosque. I opened the trunk and threw the three pieces inside...and I returned.

God is Great and strange are his ways...In the morning I heard that the mosque had been set on fire by the Hindus during the night. The newspapers said nothing about the three pieces of a dead body and I presumed Girdhari must have been burnt to ashes in the fire. Now, sahib, the field was clear for me. I said to Rukma that she should let it be known in the tenement that Girdhari had gone out of town on business. I would come to her room every night at about two and both of us would have a good time together...She held me off, saying, "No, Abdul, not so soon. We should not meet for at least fifteen days." That seemed to be reasonable and I agreed to the suggestion.

Seventeen days went by. Several times I had nightmares featuring Girdhari, I said, "You are dead Girdhari, what can you do...why should I be afraid of you?"

On the eighteenth night I was sleeping at the foot of the stairs, as usual, when Rukma came at midnight or may be an hour later and took me up to her room.

She lay down stark naked on the matting and said, "Abdul, my body is aching, please rub me down." At once I picked up the bottle of oil and started massaging her. After hardly an hour I was out of breath. Drops of my sweat fell on her glistening body, but she did not say, "Stop, Abdul, you must be tired." At last, I had to say that myself. "Rukma, dear, I'm finished, tired...exhausted." She smiled. Oh! my God, what a smile it was. I regained my breath and sat down on the matting. She got up and switched off the light and came and lay down with me. I was so tired that I was good for nothing. I put my arm on her breast and dozed off...

I don't know what the time was when I got up with a start. Something very hard was pressing into my throat. At once I thought of that wire-rope, before I could do anything to save myself, Rukma had leapt on to my chest and had given a couple of ferocious twists to the noose...the bones in my throat started creaking. I tried to shout but the sound just would'nt come out...and then I fainted.

It must have been about four in the morning when I started regaining consciousness. Very slowly my mind cleared. My throat and neck were stinging with pain. I lay like a log and silently and slowly started loosening the rope round my throat.....Suddenly, I heard voices and I held my breath. The room was very dark. I strained my eyes but could'nt see a thing. The noises I heard seemed to come from two persons grappling with one another. Rukma was panting for breath and haltingly she said, "Tukaram, put on the light." Then I heard the frightened voice of Tukaram, "No, no, Rukma, no..." Rukma replied, "You are a big coward, how will you cut him into three pieces and carry him away in the morning..." My blood suddenly stopped circulating. Tukaram and Rukma went on arguing but I heard nothing for I passed out again. I don't know when, but someone switched on the light and I sat up blinking my eyes. Tukaram let out a terrible shriek and fled from the room. Rukma closed the door and bolted it...I can't describe to you, sahib, how I felt or what my condition was ...my eyes were open, I could

see what was going on, I could hear everything, but I did'nt have the strength even to lift my little finger.

This Tukaram was no stranger to me. He often came to our tenement to sell mangoes. How Rukma had spread her tentacles to him, I don't know.

Rukma was glaring at me, as if she could not believe her eyes. She had killed me, but there I was sitting before her, still alive. She was about to swoop on me when there was a knock on the door and I heard several voices...At once, Rukma caught me by the arm and dragged me into the bathroom. After that she opened the door. It was only the neighbours who asked, "Is everything alright, we heard someone shriek?" Rukma replied, "You heard me...I sometimes walk in my sleep. That's what I did just now...I opened the door and walked out...I banged myself against the wall and shrieked in fright."

The neighbours went away and Rukma again shut the door and shot the bolt...My life was again in danger; it was obvious she would'nt let me live...the moment I realised this I felt my strength come surging back to enable me to resist her. I decided that I would tear Rukma to pieces. As I came out of the bathroom, I saw Rukma leaning out of the big window. I rushed forward, put my hands against her buttocks and pushed her out...all this happened in a flash. I heard a thud and opened the door and went down to my bed.

I remained there all night. My throat had been very badly injured you can see the scars even now...I rubbed it with oil and thought about what had happened...I was sure no one would ever get to the bottom of it...She herself had told the neighbours that she often walked in her sleep. When her body was discovered on the other side of the building, where I had pushed her out, people would think she had again taken a walk in her sleep and stumbled out of the window...At last it was morning. I had wrapped a handkerchief round my throat so that the marks would not show. It was nine o'clock. It was twelve noon, but there was no news of Rukma's body having been found. I had pushed her out into a narrow lane between two buildings. It could be entered only through two doors, to prevent passersby from committing nuisance there. Even then the lane was always

stinking with refuse thrown out of the windows of both the buildings.

Every morning the sweepers cleaned out the lane. Perhaps, the sweepress had not come on her round or she would have noticed the body the moment she opened the door. That would have led to an outcry and a commotion...the excitement would have spread. But nothing had happened. I wondered what the matter was. I wanted the people to know about Rukma's death as soon as possible.

It went on to two in the afternoon. I steeled myself and opened the door to the lane. There was no sign of the body or the refuse! Oh my God, where was that body? By the Holy Koran, if I now escape the gallows I won't be half as surprised as I was at the disappearance of Rukma's body. She had fallen from the third storey on to a lane paved with stones...she could not have lived after that fall. But, then, who had carried away her body? It's beyond the realm of reason but sahib, it is quite possible that the witch may still be alive. In the tenement the general opinion is that either she's been abducted by a Muslim or killed in the riots...If she's been killed, then so much the better...but if someone has abducted her and taken her some place then we know what he's in for...may God protect him!

Now I'll come to the part about Tukaram. Exactly twenty days after this event, he met me and asked, "Tell me, where's Rukma?"...I said, "I know nothing about her."...He said, "No, you know'...I replied, "I swear by the Holy Koran, brother, I knew nothing." He wasn't satisfied. He said, "You are lying...you have killed her. I'm going to lodge a report with the police that first you killed Girdhari and then Rukma.:"

He went away, but I was bathed in sweat. I did'nt know what to do. I thought a great deal about the situation. There was only one way out; that was to get rid of him. There was no other solution. So, sahib, I at once quietly sharpened my knife. Then I set out in search of Tukaram. As chance would have it, I saw him that very evening at five o'clock near that urinal. He put his empty fruit basket outside and went in to ease himself. I followed him. He was unknotting his *dhoti* when I called out loudly, "Tukaram"...He turned round to look at me. The knife was in my

hand. In a flash I had plunged it into his stomach . With both his hands he tried to prevent his intestines from slithering out; he folded up and fell down. What I should have done was to have run away, but what a fool I was. I bent down to feel his pulse, to see if he was dead or alive. I only knew that there was some such thing as a pulse. I was'nt sure whether it was on the side of the thumb or the other. It took me some time to find it. By that time a constable had entered the urinal, opening his trouser bottoms...and I was caught...That, sahib, is my full story...Recite the Kalima. There is but one God and Muhammad is his Messenger...I have told you the truth, nothing but the truth.

new constitution

At the tonga stand near the Railway Station, mangu enjoyed the reputation of being a wise man. All the other tonga drivers who used that stand regarded him as their mentor and called him "Ustad". In bestowing this professorial title on Mangu, they had not taken into account the fact that he had never attended any school, even for a day, but his illiteracy was no bar to his keen interest in world affairs. Whenever any tonga driver wanted to know what was going on in the world, he would always draw on ustad Mangu's fund of topical knowledge.

Some time back, Ustad Mangu had overheard some of his passengers discussing rumours of a war in Spain. On his return to the stand he had slapped Gama Chaudary on his broad back and, with a grave expression on his face, had predicted, "Mark my word, Chaudary, war is in the offing in Spain!"

Gama Chaudary had asked where Spain was and Ustad Mangu had replied with great confidence,"It's near England, where else?"

When war broke out in Spain, the tonga drivers at the Railway stand, squatting in a cricle and smoking hokkahs, were full of admiration for Ustad Mangu's political foresight. At that moment Ustad Mangu was plying his tonga on the glistening tarmac of the Mall, exchanging views with his fare on the latest Hindu-Muslim roits.

When he returned to the stand that evening, his face showed signs of animation. During the rounds of hokkas someone mentioned the Hindu-Muslim clashes. Ustad Mangu took off his *khaki* turban, tucked it under his arm and spoke in sombre tones.

"I tell you, the curse of some *pir* is on us. That's why the Hindus and Muslims are at each other's throats every other day. I've heard elders say that Akbar Badshah had displeased a darvish.

who put a curse on his Kingdom, saying that there would always be strife in his Hindustan...and that's what's been happening ever since Akbar Badshah's reign." Ustad Mangu paused. heaved a sigh, puffed his hokkkah and continued: "These Congresswalas want Hindustan to be free, but I say they'll get nowhere even if they keep at it for a thousand years. The most that can happen will be that the Angrez will go away and the Italywala will come in ....or the Rooswala, who we hear is very strong...Hindustan will remain enslaved forever, and, I forgot to tell you, that pir also said that Hindustan would always be ruled by foreigners."

Ustad Mangu hated the British, because, as he explained they held his country in subjugation and perpetrated countless atrocities on his countrymen. But why he despised them most was his ill treatment by the British soldiers stationed in the Cantonment. They treated him as if he were a dog. He also had an aversion for their complexion..their pink and ruddy faces made him feel sick. Why, he could never understand. He used to say that their ruddy wrinkled faces reminded him of a corpse whose skin was decaying and peeling off.

Whenever he had a quarrel with some drunken tommy, Ustad mangu would feel very upset for day after the indident. In the evenings at the stand he would puff his *hokkah* or cigarette and curse the tommy to his heart's content.

He would shake his head, swathed loosely in his khaki turban and say, "They came for a light and stayed on as masters of the house! I'm fed up with these sons of monkeys... they order us about, as if we were menials in their fathers service."

He would not cool down easily. As long as there was a companion by his side, he would go on unburdening himself.

"Oh! What a sight he was... like carrion ...wouldn't have survived a slap, but he went on saying something...git-pit..git-pit ...it sounded like that as if he was about to kill me. I thought of knocking his head off but restrained myself with the thought that that would be below my dignity..: He would pause for some time, and after wiping his nose on the sleeve of his *khaki* shirt would again start grumbling and muttering.

"By God, I am absolutely fed up with being nice and courteous to these lat sahibs. Whenever I see their inauspicious faces, my blood starts boiling. I wish we got some more rights under a new constitution or something so that we'd be saved from them..I swear by your life , that lives then would be worth living !"

And then, one day, Ustad Mangu overheard two persons whom he had picked up from the District Courts, saying that a new constitution for Hindustan was shortly to be enforced. His face lit up and his joy knew no bounds.

The new constitutional reforms for India were being discussed by the two passengers, both of them Marwaris, who had gone to court over some civil case.

"I've heard that the new India Act will come into force from the first of April....Will everything change with the coming of the new constitution?"

"Not every thing, but I've heard it said that a lot of things will change...and that Hindustan will get independence."

"Will the new constitution make any change in the laws regulating money-lending.?"

"I don't know, but tomorrow we'll ask some lawyer."

This conversation filled Ustad Mangu with immense happiness. He was always rather rough with his horse; besides showering it with abuses he used the whip very freely, but today as he looked back every now and then at the Marwaris, he flicked his big moustaches with his finger, let the reins drop loose on the horse's back and said, very affectionately, "Come on, my son...let's fly with the wind...."

After dropping the Marwaris at there destination, he went to Dinu Halvaee's shop in Anarkali and had half a seer of *lassi*. He belched loudly and appreciatively, sucked the dripping ends of his moustaches and suddenly shouted, "Oh you so and so's!"

When he returned to his stand that evening he did not find any of his cronies there. This unusual situation caused a strange turmoil in his mind. Today, he had big news for his friends, very big news, but none of them were there. He did not know how to get it off his chest.

For half an hour he waked up and down, under the corrugated iron shed of the tonga stand, his whip tucked under his arm, each step betraying his patience. He was feeling elated and his mind was full of rosy pictures. News of the new constitution had transported him to a new world and he was examining, from every possible angle, the India Act which was to be enforced from the first of April.

The Marwaris had been worried about the effect of new laws on usury. This delighted Ustad Mangu; his big moustaches quivered as he laughed and cursed the Marwaris "...You bugs in the poor man's cot...the new constitution will be like boiling water for the likes of you !"

He was very happy, particularly when he thought how the new constitution would affect the tommies...those white mice as he called them...they would scamper back to their holes forever !

When Nathu entered the stand, his bald head shining and carrying his turban in his hand, Ustad Mangu almost leapt at him, shouting, "Here, give me your hand... I'll give you news that'll make you happy, so happy that hair will start growing again on your bald pate."

Ustad Mangu then told Nathu all about the new constitution.

Several times he slapped his friend's back and said, "You'll see what happens...this Rooswala Badshah is bound to do something."

Ustad Mangu had heard a great deal about the socialist system of the Soviet Union and had been much impressed by its new constitution and other experiments. He had mixed up "Rooswala Badshah" with the India Act and thought that the changes that were to come into force from the first of April were due to the influence of the "Rooswala Badshah."

For some time the Red Shirt movement had been quite active in Peshawar and in some other towns. Ustad Mangu had also mixed up this organisation with the "Rooswala Badshah" and with the old constitution. Whenever he heard of people being arrested for making bombs or on the charge of rebellion, he always thought these events were the forerunners of the new

order of things. All this made him feel very optimistic about the future.

One day two barristers in his tonga, were criticising the new constitution. He heard them in silence. One of them was saying:

"The second part of the new constitution envisages a federation. I've not been able to understand it. Never in history has such a federation been heard of. It's all wrong even from the political point of view; in fact it is no federation at all!"

In their discussion the two barristers had used a very large number of English words, so Ustad Mangu could follow only the opening which gave him the impression that they were opposed to the new constitution. This to Ustad Mangu's mind was nothing short of treason. He couldn't conceive of anyone opposing his own country's freedom. Under this impression he riddled them with looks full of contempt and muttered, "Toadies!"

Whenever he used this word, toady, he would feel gratified at the thought that he had used it correctly and that he could distinguish between a man of honour and a toady.

Three days after the barristers he overheard a discussion on the same subject among three students of the Government College as he drove them to Mozang.

"The new constitution has filled one with high hopes. If that friend of mine gets elected to the Assembly, then I can be sure of a job in some Government office."

"Even otherwise there will be a lot of new posts. Perhaps., I too , will land a job somewhere."

"Yes, yes, why not."

"There will certainly be a big reduction in the number of unemployed graduates!"

This talk made Ustad Mangu even more enthusiastic about the new constitution and he came to think of it something full of radiance and splendour. He could not get it out of his mind; when the new constitution came it would usher in a new era quite different from the past and the present. He thought of the

new harness he had bought, for his horse two years ago, from Chaudary Khuda Buksh. He had selected the material very carefully. Its nickle plated buttons, brass fittings and other trappings had glistened and shone under the sun. The new constitution, too, had to be something that would scintillate and dazzle, and give a new colour and light to everything that was drab or dull.

Before the first of April, Ustad Mangu heard a great deal in favour of and against the new constitution. But nothing changed the picture he had in his mind. He was sure that on the first of April every dark cloud would lift, the atmosphere would be clear and everything would be bathed in a new light, very soothing to his eyes.

At last the thirty one days of March were over and all that remained were a few hours of the last night of the month. The weather was unusually cool for the time of the year and the breeze had a pleasing freshness about it. Early on the morning of the first of April, Ustad Mangu went to the stable and harnessed his horse between the tonga shafts. He was feeling unusually elated for that day had at last dawned, the day which would bring new laws and right for the people of his country.

In the thin haze of the early morning he drove his tonga through several narrow bazars and wide roads. Nothing had changed. Every thing was old, as old as the sky. His eyes were searching for new colours and shapes, but the only new object in view was the bunch of multi-coloured feathers on the head of his horse.

He had bought this new headgear for his horse on the thirty first of March, from Chaudary Khuda Buksh for fourteen and a half annas.

The tramp of his horse, the evenly spaced lamp-posts on the side of the road, the signboards of the shops, the little bells jingling round his horse's neck, the people in the bazars... what was it that was new? Nothing was new, but Ustad Mangu did not lose heart.

When he reached the Government College, the clock on its tower struck the hour of nine. The students near the college gates

were well dressed, but for some unknown reason Ustad Mangu thought they looked shabby. Perhaps, he wanted to see things that were entirely new and full of bright gay colours symbolic of the day.

He turned left and drove into Anarkali. Shops were opening and the traffic had increased. The confectioner' shops were crowded, the showcases in the general merchants' shops were full of bright and shiny articles, while on the telegraph wires several pigeons were pecking at each other. But nothing interested Ustad Mangu. He wanted to see some manifestation of the new constitution, something as tangible as his horse.

For Ustad Mangu it had always been a difficult thing to live through periods of expectancy. He had become a nervous wreck during the last four or five months of his wife's pregnancy. He knew that the baby would take its own time but he never had any patience with the clock. He wanted somehow to have just a brief glimpse of his child, if only he could do that then the baby could be born when it liked. To fulfil this impossible wish of his he had several times felt the swollen stomach of his ailing wife, and even put his ear to it, but he had got no clue as to what the baby would look like. Once he had lost all restraint and had shouted at his wife.

"Why are you always in bed, as if you were dead? Get up and walk about a bit ..take some exercise. Without that you'll never have enough strength for the child birth.... You'll never get very far, lying flat on your back all day ...This is no way to have babies."

Ustad Mangu was a man with very little patience. He always wanted to see quick results. His wife used to say to him whenever he had one of his fits, "You are thirsty even before the wells have been bored."

Ustad Mangu was less impatient than usual so far as the new constitution was concerned. Today, he had set out to see its effects just as he used to come out to see the processions of Gandhi or Nehru. He always judged the leaders' popularity and prestige from the size and noise of their processions, and from the garlands of flowers round their necks. The deeper the leader was submerged in flowers the bigger he became in Ustad

Mangu's eyes, and if there were some disturbances on account of the size of the procession then the leader's prestige went up even further in Ustad Mangu's estimation. Now he wanted to weigh the new constitution in the same scales.

He had come out of Anarkali and was driving his tonga slowly along the hard shiny Mall when he was hailed by a person who wanted to go to the Cantonment. After settling the fare, he flicked his whip at the horse and set off, thinking, "That's good...I may see some sign of the new constitution in the Cantonment."

After dropping his passenger at his destination in the Cantonment, Ustad Mangu took out a cigarette and holding it between the third and fourth fingers of his left hand he lit it. He then settled back comfortably on the cushioned rear seat of the tonga. When he was not very keen to get a passenger he usually occupied the back seat, wrapped the reins round his left hand and let his horse just go along. The horse always acknowledged these periods of relaxation by neighing softly and by trotting along at a leisurely pace.

The pace of the horse and that of Ustad Mangu's mind was very much the same. The pony was tramping along the road very slowly while Ustad Mangu thought lazily about the new constitution.

He was wondering what effect it would have on the system of obtaining tonga licences from the municipal authorities; he was sure that the new constitution would remove the hardships.... He was lost in thought when he became aware that someone was hailing him, someone who wanted to hire his tonga. He turned his head and saw as tommy near a lamp-post waving his arm.

When Ustad Mangu saw that it was a tommy who wanted him, all his hatred for the British soldiers welled up in his breast. At first he thought of ignoring him, but then he reasoned with himself, "It's foolishness not to take their money. The fourteen and a half annas that I've spent on the plume should come from his pocket...Come, let's go!"

He turned the tonga neatly on the empty road, touched the horse with his whip and in a flash brought the tonga to the lamp-post.

He pulled in the reins and turning to the tommy, asked, "Sahib Bahadur, where do you want to go?"

His tone was full of sarcasm. When he uttered the words "Sahib Bahadur" his moustache covered lip curled up contemptuously and the faint wrinkle which ran down his cheek, from his nostril to the chin, suddenly became prominent, as if someone had etched a line on brown sheeshum wood with a sharp knife. He was smiling and so far as he was concerned he had completely withered the tommy with the fire of the hate that burned in his breast.

The tommy, who was trying to light a cigarette, shielding himself from the breeze, turned towards the tonga. As he stepped forward, he saw Ustad Mangu...it seemed as if two guns pointing at each other had gone off and were disintegrating in the explosion.

Ustad Mangu unwound the reins from his left hand as he prepared to step down from the tonga. He was glaring at the tommy, as if he was going to chew up the Britisher. The tommy too was flicking off imaginary specks from his blue trousers, nervously awaiting Ustad Mangu's onslaught.

The tommy blew out some cigarette smoke and said, "Do you want to go, or will you again make trouble?"

"It's the same one." These words were not uttered by Ustad Mangu, but they began to dance about in his broad chest.

It was the same tommy, he was not certain of it...the same tommy with whom he had an altercation last year. The tommy had been drunk and Ustad Mangu had to bear a lot of abuse from him. He could have knocked the tommy down, given him a good hiding, but he had thought it wiser to restrain himself, for he knew that the magistrates usually took a very severe view of the tonga drivers' behaviour in such cases.

Ustad Mangu had this incident in mind, but then he thought of the first of April. He asked "Where do you want to go?" He spoke as if he had lashed out with his whip.

The tommy named the red light area.

"That'll cost you five rupees," said Ustad Mangu, and his moustaches quivered.

The tommy was astonished. "Five rupees?" he shouted indignantly. "Are you in your senses...?

"Yes, five rupees". Ustad Mangu clenched his big hairy hand and started examining his fist. He asked, "Do you want to go or are you wasting my time?"

His tone was very harsh. In the light of last year's incident the tommy did not at all take into account Ustad Mangu's towering build. He thought Ustad Mangu should again be taught a lesson. Encouraged by his previous experience with Ustad Mangu, he strutted up to the tonga and signalled with his stick, asking Ustad Mangu to step down. The polished stick touched Ustad Mangu's thigh twice. From the perch, he sized up the tommy who was of medium height and build. Then suddenly his fist shot out and landed on the tip of the tommy's chin. He clambered out of his seat and pushed the tommy back and was soon giving him the thrashing of his life. The tommy tried his best to ward off Ustad Mangu's heavy blows, but when he saw that his opponent was fighting like a maniac, his eyes blood-shot he began to yell for help. This spurred on Ustad Mangu and the ferocity of his attack increased. He hit the tommy again and again, and every time he landed a blow, he said, "Still the high and mighty tone...it's the first of April and now we are our own masters....."

A crowd collected. It was with great difficulty that two policemen managed to restrain Ustad Mangu. He stood between them, his broad chest heaving up and down as he panted for breath. he was foaming at the mouth, but his *eyes* were smiling. Still struggling for breath, he addressed the amazed crowd, "Gone are the days of the British...we now have a new constitution, brothers... a new constitution."

The poor tommy examined his badly hurt face and looked owlishly at the crowd.

The constables took Ustad Mangu to the police station. On the way and at the police station, he kept on yelling. "The new

constitution...the new constitution." But no one understood what he was referring to.

"What are you shouting about...what new laws and rights are you shouting about...the laws are the same old ones..."

And Ustad Mangu was locked up in a cell.

mummy

HER name was Stella Jackson but everyone called her Mummy. She was in her forties and of medium height. Her husband was killed in World War I, about ten years ago and she had been on pension ever since.

I do not know how or when she came to Poona. As a matter of fact I never bothered about her antecedents. She was such an interesting woman that on meeting her one did not care to know anything more than her fascinating personality. Her antecedents did not matter for she was connected with everything in Poona. Perhaps, this is somewhat of an exaggeration, but for me she is Poona, and everything there, with which my memories are associated, is pervaded with Mummy's strange personality.

I met her in Poona. By nature, I am a very lazy person, although I have always longed to travel far and wide. If you heard me holding forth on the subject you would imagine that I was on the verge of embarking upon an expedition to conquer Kinchinchunga or some other Himalayan mountain withh some such name. It is possible that I may set out, but it is even more probable, that, having reached the top I would not budge from there.

God knows how long I had been in Bombay. Perhaps , you can get some idea from this...when I went to Poona my wife was with me...we had a baby but he died four years ago and in the meantime...now, let me calculate...I think, I can say that I had been in Bombay eight years. During this period I had not yet got round to visiting Victoria Gardens or the Museum. Now suddenly, I had decided to visit Poona. I was annoyed with my employers at the film studios...it was over a trifle...and to get rid of my vexation I thought a visit to Poona would distract me, and, that too, because Poona was quite near and I had some friends there.

I was going to Parbhatnagar, to the house of Harish a former colleague of mine. At Poona Railway Station I was told that this place was quite far away but I had already taken a tonga.

Slow moving things irk me but I had come only for a change. There was no need for haste. It was a rotten type of tonga, worse than the *ekka* of aligarh. Always there was the danger of falling off; the horse moved forwards and the passener backwards! I became restles after a slow jolting journey through a couple of dusty bazars. I consulted my wife as to what should be done.

She said the sun was hot and all the tongas she had seen were no better than ours; if we left it, we would have to walk and that would be much worse. I did not think it proper to differ with her...the sun was really hot!

The horse could not have gone more than another furlong, when another tonga of the same atrocious design passed us. Suddenly, some one yelled, "Ohy, Manto, you horse!"

I looked round. It was Chadda. A worn out mem was with him. Both sat close together. My first reaction was one of regret. Where was Chadda's aesthetic sense? What an odd creature he had with him? I did not try to guess the hag's age at that time, but her wrinkles were clearly visible under layers of powder and rouge. Her make up was so loud that it was almost revolting.

I had not seen Chadda, who was one of my best friends, for a long time. To this "Ohy, Manto, you horse!" I could have responded with an appropriate demonstration of the initimacy that existed between us, but his companion had the effect of shrivelling up any such urge in me.

I had my tonga stopped and so did Chadda. Turning to the woman beside him, Chadda, said, in English, "Mummy, I'll be a minute," and he jumped out of the tonga and came towards me, shouting, "You?...you here?" He was very informal. With his outstretched hand he heartily shook my wife's hand, who tried to remain aloof. He said to her, "Bhabijan, you're a wonder...you've moved a mountain."

"Where are you going?" I asked.

Chadda said in a loud voice, "I've got something to do. ...but look, you go straight down..." He abruptly turned to my tongawala, "take sahib to my place... and no fare from him!" He broke off again and taking my acceptance of his invitation for granted, said, "Go now...my servant'll be there...you can look after the rest.

And he hopped back into his tonga and sat with the elderly mem whom he had called Mummy. I felt relieved. Actually the depression that had come over me seeing them together had lifted to a great extent.

His tonga started. I did not say anything to my tongawala. After three or four furlongs he halted outside a structure which looked like a dak bungalow and alighted. "We've arrived, sahib," I asked.

"Where?" I asked.

He replied. "This is Chadda sahib's house."

I looked inquiringly at my wife. Her frown told me that she did not like Chadda's house. To tell the truth she had not wanted to come to Poona at all. She was sure that I would meet some of my bottle friends there and being already furnished with the excuse of wanting to be rid of the vexation that oppressed me would drink round the clock. I got down from the tonga, picked the small attache case we had with us and said to my wife, "Let's go."

From my actions she seemed to have realised that she would have to accept my decision, for she alighted from the tonga, and without a word of protest, accompanied me inside.

It was a very ordinary house. It seemed to be a temporary military construction which had been used for some time and then vacated. The lime and clay plaster was very dirty and cracked at several places. Inside, the house was like that of any careless bachelor who is a film star and whose film company paid his monthly salary every three months and even that in instalments.

I fully realised that any married woman would feel very much ill at ease in so barren a home. My plan was to wait for Chadda

and then go to Parbhatnagar with him. Harish who lived there had a wife and children, and I felt that my wife would manage to put up with them for a couple of days.

The servant was a strange irresponsible person. We found all the doors of the house open, but he was missing. When he came he took no notice of us as if we had been sitting there for years and intended to remain there for ever. When he passed through the room without seeing us I thought he was a film extra who lived with Chadda. Upon my asking him I discovered that he was Chadda sahib's trusted servant in person.

My wife and I were thirsty. We asked him for water. He started looking for tumblers and after a long search located a broken mug under an almirah. He extracted it and muttered, "Last night sahib got a dozen glasses...not one is to be found now."

I pointed at the broken mug in his hand and asked, "Is that for our water?"

My wife laughed, much to the confusion of the servant...He said, "No, sahib...I'm...I'm...still looking for the glasses."

My wife told him not to bring the water. He returned the broken mug under the almirah as if that was its proper place and if he put it anywhere else it would upset the entire system of the household. After that he left the room as if he knew all about us and had brought us all we wanted.

I was sitting on a bed which was probably Chadda's. Not far from the bed were two reclining chairs. My wife sat in one of them and tried to make herself comfortable. For quite some time we sat thus, without speaking. Then Chadda came in. He was alone. He was not conscious of our position as guests and did nothing to assume the role of a host which was incumbent on him.

"That is that!...he said, as he entered the room, "So you've come, old boy!...let's go to the studios. If you are with me it will be easier to get an advance...this evening..." He broke off, realising that my wife was present and burst out laughing, "Bhabijan, you haven't made a *maulvi* of him, have you?" He laughed even louder. "Damn the *maulvis!* Get up Manto. Bhabian please wait here, we'll be back shortly."

My wife's indignation was rapidly approaching boiling point. I went out with Chadda. I knew she would sulk for some time and then doze off and that is what happened. The studios were quite near. With the air of being in an embarrassing position, Chadda went to the accountant and rushed him into advancing him two hundred rupees. On our return, after three quarters of an hour, we found my wife fast asleep in the chair. We did not think it proper to disturb her and retired into the adjoining room which looked like a junkshop. Every thing in the room was damaged or broken as if by design, for it gave the room a peculiar homogenity. A coat of dust covered everything, as if it was an intrinsic part of the room, without which it could not maintain its Bohemian atmosphere. Chadda immediately hunted out his servant and handing him a hundred rupee note said, "Oh Prince of China!...Get two bottles of third class rum...I mean XXX Rum and half a dozen glasses."

I came to know gradually that the servant was not only the Prince of China but of various other countries of the world. He became the prince of whichever country's named rolled off Chadda's tongue! For the present he was Prince of China and he went away crinkling the hundred rupee note between his fingers.

Chadda sat down on the bed, on the broken springs of its mattress, licked his lips in anticipation of the rum and said, "That is that!...So, after all you have come here..."His face clouded, "I say, what about Bhabi?...she'll be upset."

Chadda did not have a wife, but he was very considerate about others' wives. He respected them so much that he wanted to remain a bachelor all his life. He used to say, "I've an inferiority complex which has prevented me from that state of bliss. Whenever there is talk of marriage I'm all for it, but later, I feel that I do not deserve it and the whole thing goes into cold storage."

The rum came and with it some tumblers. Chadda had asked for six but the Prince of China brought only three; the other three broke while he was bringing them home! Chadda did not care for the loss and thanked God that the rum was safe. Hurriedly he opened a bottle and poured rum into the virgin glasses. He

proposed the toast. "To your visit to Poona." We drained the glasses empty.

Starting off on the second round, Chadda went to the other room and reported that my wife was still asleep. He felt very sorry for her. He said, "Let's wake her up...I'll be noisy...then we'll...but wait...I must arrange for tea. He took a little sip of the rum and called out, "Prince of Jamaica!"

The Prince of Jamaica appeared forthwith. Chadda said to him, "Go to Mummy and ask her to send some first class tea...at once!"

The servant went away. Chadda emptied his glass and poured himself a normal peg, saying , "I'll go slow for the time being. The first four pegs make me very sentimental and I have to accompany you to Parbhatnagar to leave Bhabi there."

The tea came after half an hour. The tea things were clean and tastefully arranged on a tray. Chadda lifted the tea-cosy and sniffed the tea. He seemed delighted. "Mummy, you are a jewel!" He then started storming at the Prince of Ethiopia and made such a din that my ears began to buzz. After that he lifted up the tray and said to me "Come."

My wife was awake. Chadda deftly placed the tray on a broken teapoy and said, "Tea is served, Begum Sahiba!"

My wife did not care much for the clowning but she took two cups of tea as the pot and the cups were clean. The beverage seemed to soothe her. She said to us meaningly, "You must have had your *tea!*"

I did not reply, but Chadda bowed and truthfully, said "Yes, we plead guilty, but we pray for mercy."

When my wife smiled, he laughed loudly, "We are blue blooded swines...for us nothing is forbidden !...Come, let's lead you to the Mosque!"

Again, my wife froze for she did not like Chadda's joke. In fact, she hated Chadda, as she hated all my friends. She detested Chadda particularly, because at times he overstepped the limits of familiarity, but this did not bother him. I think Chadda never gave the matter a thought. He did not believe in worrying over

trifles, which he regarded as meaningless as Ludo. He looked at my wife's frown quite serenely and shouted for his servant, "Oh Prince of Kababistan!...Call us a tonga of the Rolls Royce type."

The Prince of Kababistan went out and so did Chadda, who probably went only to the adjoining room. I took the opportunity of explaining to my wife that there was no need to get all worked up. There were times in our lives when we had to face situations we had never bargained for. The best way of overcoming them was to let them resolve themselves. But, as usual, she paid no heed to my Confucian advice and remained angry. Meanwhile, the Prince of Kababistan returned with the Rolls Royce tonga and we left for Parbhatnagar.

It was very fortunate Harish was not at home. His wife was there and we left my wife to be looked after by her. Chadda said, "It's said melons take on each other's colour..it's the same with wives. On our return in a short while we'll see if this is true. Come, Manto, let's catch your friend at the studios."

Chadda always rushed matters so that others seldom had a chance to muster their thoughts. He grabbed my arm and had me out of the room before my wife could say anything. In the tonga, Chadda said, "That is that!..What's the programme now?" and he burst out laughing. "Mummy...Mummy the Great!"

I was going to ask him which Tutankheman's child was this mummy when Chadda turned the conversation into another channel and my question died an unnatural death.

The tonga returned to the dak bungalow type of building known as Felicity Cottage. Chadda, however, called it Adversity Cottage, because he said that all who lived in it were victims of misfortune. I came to know later that this was wrong.

This cottage had several inmates but it had a deserted look. All of them were employed in the film company which paid their monthly salaries every three months, and, that, too, in several instalments. As I was introduced to them one by one I discovered that almost all of them were assistant directors. One was a chief assistant director, another his deputy, then there were assistants to assistants...half of them were assistants to the other

half ...and they were all raising capital to set up film companies of their own. From their dress and general grooming all of them seemed to be film stars. Food in Poona was rationed but none of them had a ration card. Provisions which could be had at controlled prices quite easily if they took a little trouble and got ration cards were obtained from the black market. They went to the movies and to the races when it was the season or they speculated on cotton futures. They seldom made money. But lost almost every day.

Felicity Cottage was very crowded. Since accommodation was limited even the motor garage was used for residential purposes by a family of three. The wife's name was Shirin. As if just to break the monotony her husband was not an assistant director. He was employed in the same film company but as a chauffeur. I never saw this good man; no one knew when he came or went. Shirin had a baby boy whom all the inmates of Felicity Cottage took turns at playing with in their hours of leisure. Shirin who was good looking spent most of her time in the garage.

Chadda and his companions occupied the more respectable portion of the cottage. His companions also were actors but not stars. One was Saeed whose screen name was Ranjit Kumar. He had a pleasant face and spoke very seldom. Chadda used to call him a tortoise because he did everything very slowly.

I do not remember the name of the other actor. Everyone called him Gharib Nawaz, which meant nurturer of the poor. He was connected with a rich Hyderabad family. He wanted to be an actor and had come to Poona. His monthly salary was two hundred and fifty rupees, but, ever since his appointment, a year ago , he had received only two hundred and fifty rupees as an advance and that too he had obtained for Chadda, who had to pay off a ferocious Pathan moneylender. His hobby was to write stories about the glamour of film life and sometimes composed verses. Everyone in the cottage owed him money.

Shakil and Aqil were brothers and were assistants to some assistant directors. The name Shakil meant handsome and Aqil wise, but it was like calling ebony ivory and both of them were always trying to prove that this was justifiable.

The Big Three, that Chadda, Saeed and Bharib Nawaz regrded Shirin as their protege. They, however, never went to the garage together. There was no fixed time for their calls. Whenever the three of them found themselves together in the living room of the cottage one of them would go out to the garage and stay there for some time advising Shirin about domestic matters. The other two would remain in the living room.

Those of the assistants category used to help Shirin; got things for her from the bazar, took her clothes to the laundry or played with her baby when it cried.

None of them seemed victims of adversity. They were happy and elated, perhaps, about their adverse fortune! They spoke of their woes almost gleefully. There was no doubt that their's were interesting lives.!

We were entering the cottage when Gharib Nawaz came out. Chadda looked at him closely and then drew out some currency notes from his pocket. Without counting them he handed them over to Gharib Nawaz and said, "Get four bottles of Scotch. If the money is short, make it up yourself; if it is in excess return the change to me."

A smile spread over Gharib Nawaz's dark Hyderabadi lips. Chadda burst out laughing and after a look at me said to Gharib Nawaz, "This is Mister One Two or Man - too...but I cannot permit a fuller introduction at the moment...he's only had rum! In the evening after Scotch...but you should be on your way...hurry up!"

Gharib Nawaz went away and we entered the cottage. Chadda yawned and picked up a bottle of rum which was less than half empty. Holding it up against the light to see how much remained, he shouted. "Prince of Kazakistan!" When the servant came into the room, Chadda pouring a big peg into his glass said, "You rogue, you've taken too much."

After this glass he became slightly worried, "I say, why on earth did you bring Bhabi here...it's weighing on me." Then he consoled himself. "I don't think she'll be bored there."

"Yes, at least she won't plan to murder me right away." I said, as I poured rum into my glass. It tasted like stale molasses.

The junk dump where we sat had two windows with vertical iron bars. Beyond them was open space. From that direction someone called out loudly for Chadda. I started and saw Vankatray, the music director. I could not make out what race he belonged to; Mongol, Negroid or Aryan. Sometimes one almost placed him in a racial group but suddenly some feature would force one to start examining his face all over again. He was a Marhatta but instead of Shivaji's sharp nose his was flat and crooked. which he thought was the right nasal formation for the correct rendering of certain musical notes. He saw me and yelled, "Manto...Manto, *seth!*"

Chadda shouted back in an even louder voice, *"Seth* be damned...come on in!

He was in the room in a flash. Laughing, he took out a bottle of rum from his pocket and put it on the teapoy. Speaking in Bombay Urdu, he said, *"Sala* I went to Mummy...she said your friend had come...I said who can this *sala* friends be ...I didn't know it was Manto."

Chadda smacked Vankatray's pumpkin-like head, "Shut up, *"Salay,* you have brought rum...that's good enough for you!"

Vankatray rubbed his head and picking up my empty glass, poured a peg for himself. "Manto...the moment I met this *sala* today he said he wanted to drink...I was absolutely broke...I wondered what I should do..."

Chadda again smacked him on the head. "Sit down and don't talk...as if you could think."

"Salay, how did I get this big bottle if I couldn't think? Do you think your father sent it to me as a present?... Vankatray drained off his rum in one long draught. Chadda paid no heed to what he had said and asked. "Tell me what did Mummy say?... was Polly there? ... and when is Mozelle exepcted?...and what about that platinum blonde?"

Vankatray was about to reply when Chadda leant forward, caught my arm and said, "Manto, by God, she's a peach...of a peculiar variety...I had heard that there was some such thing as a platinum blonde but had never had the chance of seeing one

until yesterday...Her hair is like very fine silver threads...it's great...Manto, by God, it's very great.....Long Live Mummy!"

He then glared at Vankatray and in a rasping tone demanded an explanation, 'Vankatray, you toad, why did'nt you shout, Long Live Mummy?"

Chadda and Vankatray both shouted, "Long live Mummy" several times, after which Vankatray wanted to answer Chadda's earlier question but he was again silenced. "Forget it, old chap," said Chadda, "I've become sentimental. At the moment I am pondering over the usual comparison poets make between sweetheart's black hair and dark clouds, but here we face a different situation..."He then looked at me, "Manto, I'm all muddled up. Her hair is like silver threads; actually, it isn't the colour of silver. I don't know what platinum looks like, never having seen the metal...it's a strange colour, a mixture of silver and steel..."

Vankatray who had finished his second peg said,"...and tinged slightly with...rum."

Chadda shuddered and called him a dirty name. "Don't talk rot." He looked at me with an expression full of self-pity. "I've really become very sentimental...yes...that colour ...by God its matchless! Have you ever seen the belly of a fish...no...no...it's all over the fish, especially pomfrets...what do you call those shiny things...no...no, like the tiny scales on a snake...yes, their colour, their glistening colour...her hair has the same lustre...all the locks of her hair are like little snakes upturned..." He stopped abruptly and stood up, "Damn the little snakes...I'm becoming sentimental again."

Very naively, Vankatray asked, "What is that?" He wanted to know the meaning of sentimental, for Chadda had used the English word.

Chadda replied, "Sentimental...if you know you'll be none the wiser, you descendent of Balaji Baji Rao and Nana Farnavis....

Vankatray poured himself another peg and turning to me said, "This sala, Chadda, thinks no end of himself. I know English. I'm a matriculate...sala...my father was very fond of me...he..."

Chadda broke in. "He made a Tansen of you, twisted your nose so that you may not have much difficulty with your nasal notes, taught you to sing *durpat* while you were a child, you cried for your milk in *mian ki todi* and wet your daipers singing *adana*...and you uttered your first word in *pat deepak*...and your father was a maestro to the whole world and today you wear his mantle. "He turned to me, "Manto, whenever this *sala* drinks he starts on an endless eulogy of his father. If his father was fond of him how should that effect his relations with me. If he's a Matriculate I don't see why I should tear up my B.A. degree!"

Vankatray wanted to rise against this torrent, but Chadda smothered the attempt at its inception, "Pipe down...I've already said I've become sentimental...and now that colour ...like a pomfrot's...no, no...like the tiny scales on the snake's belly...that's the colour...God knows what tune Mummy played on her *been* to draw out this serpent?"

Vankatray began to open the bottle he had brought with him "Manto," he said, "This girl is quite good."

"We'll see." I said.

Tonight...this very night, I'm throwing a party. It's fortunate you came and because of you Shri Mehtaji gave me an advance on my salary, otherwise it would have been very difficult. Tonight...tonight..."Before he could finish Chadda burst into a song in a cracked voice.

"Tonight strum not the Strings of Sorrow."

Poor Vankatray was about to raise his voice in protest against this outrage when Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar entered the room. Both had two bottles each of Scotch, which they placed on the table. I knew Ranjit Kumar quite well but not intimately. For some time we indulged in formal conversation and clinking our glasses began drinking together.

Chadda had really become very sentimental. Every time he spoke, the platinum blonde came into the conversation. Ranjit Kumar had consumed a quarter of the second bottle of rum, while Gharib Nawaz had three pegs of Scotch. All of them were now more or less at the same stage of intoxication. Being habitually a heavier drinker my head was quite clear. From their

talk I gathered that all four of them were badly smitten by the new girl Mummy had introduced into her circle. Her name was Phyllis and she worked in a hair dressing saloon in Poona. An effeminate youth usually kept her company. She was about fourteen or fifteen years old. Gharib Nawaz was so far gone on her that he was prepared to sell his ancestral property in Hyderabad and spend it on her. Chadda's only trump card was his looks, while Vankatray thought he could enchant the fairy with his music. Ranjit Kumar thought that force was the only way... But ultimately all of them wondered whom Mummy would favour. This gave me the impression that Mummy, whom I had seen with Chadda in the tonga, could make over the girl to any one she wished.

In the midst of the discussion on Phyllis, Chadda suddenly looked at his watch and said to me. "Let the girl go to hell...Let's go, your wife must be getting fed up...I hope I don't become sentimental there...you can look after me." He finished his drink and shouted for his servant. "Oh Prince of Egypt -- the Land of Mummies!"

The Prince of the Land of the Mummies appeared, rubbing his eyes as if he had just been excavated after centuries of slumber. Chadda sprinkled rum on his face. "Get two tongas...they should look like Egyptian chariots!"

The tongas came and all of us piled into them and left for Parbhatnagar. We found Harish at home. Even at that out of the way place where he lived he had been very hospitable to my wife. Chadda winked at him and fortunately Harish understood what we were up to. My wife made no complaints. Her stay at Parbhatnagar must have been quite pleasant. Harish who was an expert on women psychology made entertaining conversation in the course of which he asked my wife whether she would like to see the shooting of his latest picture which was under production. My wife said, "Yes, if they are taking a song sequence."

Harish replied, "No, not today...but tomorrow's programme includes a song sequence...I think you should go tomorrow..."

It seemed that Harish's wife was tired of seeing the shooting of films and taking others to see it. She at once said to my wife,

"Yes, it will be much better tomorrow...You must have had a tiring journey."

We heaved a sigh of relief. Harish continued his lively chatter for some time and then turning to me said, "I say, Manto...you come with me." He looked at my three companions and said, "Take leave of them...the boss wants to hear your new story.

I looked at my wife and said to Harish,"You'd better ask her first." My simple wife had already been hoodwinked. She said to Harish, "When we left Bombay, I told him to carry his brief case, but he said he wouldn't need it...how will he read out the story."

"He can tell it from memory," replied Harish, looking at me as if he wanted me to say yes quickly.

Without any outward sign of eagerness, I said, "Yes, I suppose I can do that."

Chadda added the final touch to the drama, by saying, "Then, we're off." The three of them got up and went away. After some time Harish and I also left the room. The tongas were waiting outside Parbhatnagar. The moment Chadda saw us, he shouted, " Long Live Maharaja Harish Chandra!"

All of us, except Harish who had a date with a girl friend, left for Mummy's house. It was a cottage, very much like Felicity Cottage, but much cleaner and tidier. It spoke well of Mummy's taste and aesthetic sense. The furniture was plain and inexpensive, but it was well and properly arranged. When we started from Parbhatnagar, I had thought that Mummy's house would be like a brothel, but this was not so. There was nothing in Mummy's cottage which would suggest such an establishment. It was as respectable as the house of any well-to-do Anglo-Indian. There was just one discordant note; the house seemed rather young for a woman of Mummy's age. It also did not have any make-up, like the one I had seen on Mummy's face. When she came to the room I felt that the things around here were not of recent acquisition or manufacture but while Mummy had put on years and aged they had retained their freshness. When I looked at her made up face I wished, I do not know why, that like the room, she, too, would become sober and ageless.

Chadda introduced me to Mummy. It was a brief introduction. All that he said to me about her was, "This is Mummy...the Great Mummy..." Mummy smiled at her introduction and looking at me, said to Chadda in English, "As usual, you sent for tea in great haste...I wonder if they liked it?" Then she turned to me. "Mr Manto, I'm sorry I couldn't do better...But the fault is all your friend's...he's my son, my naughty son!"

I thanked her for the tea, which I praised. Mummy was sure I was only being nice and turning to Chadda said, "I have made arrangements for their dinner in anticipation of a last minute demand..."

Chadda gave her a hug. "Mummy, you're a jewel! Now, we'll eat the dinner."

"What? ...no, you'll do nothing of the sort..."

"We left Mrs Manto at Parbhatnagar," Chadda told Mummy.

"God damn you, why did you do that?"

Chadda burst out laughing, "Why, have you forgotten?... there's a party on tonight."

"Oh! that...the moment I saw Mrs Manto, my heart said to me that the party should be called off and it was!" Mummy lit herself a cigarette.

Chadda's face fell. "God damn you!" he retorted, "We planned all this for the party." He slumped down into a chair and spoke as if addressing every object in the room. "All my hopes are dashed...the platinum blonde...hair of the colour of the scales on the belly of a snake..." Suddenly, he shot up from the chair and caught Mummy by the arms. "Cancelled it...your heart spoke to you?...look I'll reinstate your original order." With his finger. Chadda wrote "stet" over Mummy's heart and shouted, "Hooray!"

Mummy had informed all who were coming to the party that it had been cancelled, but I could see that she did not want to disappoint Chadda. She playfully tapped Chadda's cheeks with her fingers and said, "Don't worry...I'll make arrangements again, just now."

She went out to make the arrangements. Chadda shouted with joy and said to Vankatray. "General Vankatray...proceed to the Headquarters and collect all the ammunition."

Vankatray saluted and left the room to carry out the orders. Felicity Cottage was quite near. In ten minutes he was back with all the bottles carried by Chadda's servant. Chadda saw him and said, "Welcome...welcom, Oh Prince of Koh Kaf...that girl with hair like scales on a snake's belly is coming...you too may try your luck...'

Ranjit Kumar and Gharib Nawaz did not like this open invitation. Both of them expressed to me their resentment at Chadda's uncouthness. They were deeply hurt by Chadda's remark to his servant. Chadda went on being his normal cheerful self, while they sulked in a corner, sipping rum and airing their injured feelings.

I was thinking about Mummy. In the drawing room were Gharib Nawaz, Ranjit Kumar, Vankatray and Chadda. They looked like little children whose mother had gone out to buy toys for them. They were all in an expectant mood. Chadda felt sure that he would get the best toy because he was the mother's favourite. Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar afflicted with a common grief were allies. In this atmosphere liquor was like milk and that platinum blonde...I pictured her as a tiny little doll for whom every hand would reach out...Every place and atmosphere has a music of its own. Here the atmosphere was that of a family gathering, the maternal note being the strongest.

My aesthetic sense had received a jolt when I had seen Mummy in the tonga. I was sorry now that I had thought badly of her and Chadda. But her garish make-up bothered me; I thought it was an insult to the wrinkles on her face and the maternal feelings she had for Chadda, Gharib Nawaz and Vankatray...and God alone knows for how many others!

Suddenly I asked Chadda, "I say, why does your Mummy wear such loud make-up?"

"Because the world likes things that hit the eye...there are very few fools like us who prefer soft colours and tones and who do not like to see youth in the garb of childhood...and...and who do

not like to youth-plate old age....We who call ourselves artists are damned fools...I'll illustrate my point....The Baisakhi Fair was on...this happened in your Amritsar...some Jats were passing Ram Bagh Bazar where the cheapest brothels are located. A young Jat, glowing with health, brought up on pure milk and butter, balancing his new shoes on the top of his tall *lathi,* looked up and saw a jet black girl dressed in very gaudy colours, her curls almost dripping with oil and patted untidily against her forehead. He proded his companion in the ribs with his elbow and said, Ohy!...Lena Si'an ...Ohy!...look...look up...in the village, buffaloes are all that we...!

God knows why Chadda did not complete the sentence, for he never bothered about good taste or refinement. He started laughing, poured rum into my glass and said, "For that Jat that ugly harlot was a fairy from Koh Kaf and the prettiest of his village bells nothing more than ungainly buffaloes...we are all idiots...of the middle class. In this world nothing belongs to the first class, they are either third or second class...but...but Phyllis belongs to an extra special class...those scales of snakes..."

Vankatray poured his drink on Chadda's head. "Scales...scales...you've gone off your head!"

Chadda began to lick the drops of rum as they trickled down his face. He said to Vankatray, "Come now...begin...tell us about your father's great love for you...my mind is quite cool now."

Vankatray turned to me, became very serious and said, "By God, my father loved me very much...I was fifteen when he got me married...".

Chadda laughed out loudly, "The *sala* made you a cartoon...May God give him a Kasireel Harmonium in Heaven so that with the help of its music he may snare a pretty nymph for you."

Vankatray became even more serious. "Manto...I do not lie...my wife is very beautiful...in my family..."

"Damn your family...talk about Phyllis ...no one can be prettier than she." Chadda looked at Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar, who had not moved from their corner, and were about to begin a mutual exchange of views on Phyllis' beauty. "You Gunpowder Plot conspirators.... listen ...your intrigues will never get you

anywhere.... Chadda will gain the day...what's your opinion, Prince of Wales?"

The Prince of Wales was staring greedily at the empty rum bottles. Chadda laughed, filled half a glass and gave it to him.

Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar were talking to each other secretively about Phyllis and their manner showed that they were really making plans of their own to possess her.

Lights had been switched on in the drawing room for it was getting dark. I was telling Chadda the latest news about the film industry in Bombay when Mummy's high pitched voice was heard from the verandah. Chadda shouted with joy and ran out of the room. Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar exchanged looks full of some deep significance and then glanced towards the door.

Mummy was talking away at top speed as she entered the room along with four or five Anglo-Indian girls, of various sizes, features and complexions. Their names were Polly, Dolly, Kitty, Amelia and Thelma... and that effeminate boy whom Chadda called Sissy, Phyllis was the last to enter and with her came Chadda, his arm round her slim waist. I looked at Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar to note their reactions. It was obvious from their expressions that they did not like the way he was showing off as if he was already the victor.

With the arrival of the girls the room was filled with noise. Everyone spoke in English and Vankatray, the Matriculate, braved the torrent of foreign words. He went under several times, but carried on gamely. When no one paid any attention to what he said, he led Thelma, who was Amelia's elder sister, to the sofa and sat there with her. He began asking her whether she had learnt any new Indian dances. While he explained the toras of some dances, Chadda surrounded by the other girls recited obscene limericks, which he knew by the thousand. Mummy was ordering soda and some eatables. Ranjit Kumar took deep puffs at his cigarette and stared fixedly at Phyllis. Gharib Nawaz kept on telling Mummy that she should not hesitate to ask him for money if she ran short.

A bottle of Scotch was opened and the rounds began. When it was offered to Phyllis she gave her platinum hair a little toss and said she never took whisky. Everyone insisted but she refused to drink it. Chadda expressed his disappointment and Mummy mixed a very weak drink and putting the glass to Phyllis' lips said, coaxingly, "Come on, dear, be brave and drink it off!"

Phyllis did not refuse and Chadda immediately regained his spirits and recited dozens of limericks. Everyone relished them. I began to wonder whether man took to clothes when he was tired of nakedness. Perhaps that was the reason why he now sometimes wanted to tear off the covers and run towards nudity. Vulgarity was undoubtedly the natural reaction to refinement; it definitely had an attraction all its own for it provided a momentary escape from the monotony of inhibitions.

I looked at Mummy who was quite at home with the young girls about her, listening to Chadda's limericks and laughing loudly at each one of them. Her face wore the same horrid make-up. Beneath it, I could clearly see her wrinkles, which seemed animated. I began to wonder...why do people think badly of escapist tendencies. The manifestations of escapism which I saw before me might have had an ugly exterior but intrinsically they were very beautiful..naturally beautiful, without the help of any cosmetics.

Polly and Ranjit Kumar stood in a corner. She was telling him about her new frock; how with her ingenuity she had managed to get a dress of such fine material so very cheap. There were two cut-pieces, which had seemed too little to be of any use. Now they formed a pretty dress. Ranjit Kumar made her a solemn promise that he would buy her two dresses although he knew that his film company would never pay him the required amount in one instalment.

Dolly was trying to touch Gharib Nawaz for some money and was telling him that she would pay him back on her pay day. Gharib Nawaz knew that as usual the loan would never be returned, but he pretended to believe her.

Thelma was trying to learn from Vankatray the execution of some difficult toras of the Tandeo dance. He new she would never be able to learn the toras but he went on coching her and

Thelma took the lessons with great interest and seriousness, although she too realised that she was wasting Vankatray's and her time. Amelia and Kitty were talking about some girl Ivy, who had given them a bad tip at the races..they wondered whether she had tried to get even for some bad turn they might have done her. Chadda dipped Phyllis's platinum hair in the molten gold Scotch in his glass. Every now and then Sissy took a comb out of his pocket and ran it through his hair. Mummy was all over the room, exchanging a few words here, a few words there getting the soda bottles opened, having broken glass tumblers removed ...nothing escaped her eye. Even when she rested she was like a recumbent cat, with half closed eyes, knowing where each of her kittens is and what it is up to.

In the atmosphere before me, I wondered if anything was out of place. Every thing seemed perfectly blended and in harmony. Even Mummy's garish make-up seemed an essential part of the picture. Ghalib has said,

> "The Prison of Life and the Shackles of
> Sorrow are one and the same,
> Why then should man be free from Sorrow
> before Death?"

If life is a prison and is the same thing as the shackles of sorrow is it incumbent upon man not to try for a brief respite before death...why should he wait for the Angel of Death, why should he not indulge in the fascinating pastime of self-deception?

Mummy had a good word for almost everyone she knew. She had a warm maternal affection for all. I wondered whether she used such bright make-up to hide her real self. Perhaps, she felt that physically she was incapable of being mother to all. So she had selected a few persons for her love and affection and had left out the rest of the world.

Without Mummy's knowledge Chadda had managed to give Phyllis a stiff peg of whisky. This was not done surreptitiously but quite openly. At that time Mummy was in the kitchen frying potato chips. Phyllis was tipsy and swaying slightly, like the motion of her hair which was glistening like polished steel.

It was midnight. Vankatray had tired of teaching Thelma the dance toras and was now telling her about his father's great love for him, his early marriage and of the great beauty of his wife. Gharib Nawaz had given Dolly the money she had asked for and had already forgotten about it. Ranjit Kumar had taken Polly out of the room. Amelia and Kitty had talked of almost everything under the sun and were very tired and wanted to rest. Mummy, Phyllis and Sissy sat round the teapoy. Chadda was no longer sentimental and sat near Phyllis who was intoxicated with whisky for the first time in her life. His eyes betrayed his desire to possess Phyllis and Mummy was not unaware of this.

After some time Sissy got up and stretched himself out on a sofa, and began to play about with his hair. Gharib Nawaz and Dolly disappeared from the room. Amelia and Kitty talking about some Margaret were the next to go, after taking leave of Mummy. Vankatray spoke of his wife's beauty for the last time, looked hungrily towards Phyllis and then at Thelma by his side. He took her by the arm and led her out to show her the moon.

Suddenly, I do not know what happened , there were hot words between Mummy and Chadda. His tongue faltered and he fumbled with words as he began to be rude to Mummy acting like a disobedient child. Phyllis made frail attempts to mediate between the two but Chadda was flying off the handle. He wanted to take Phyllis to Felicity Cottage. Mummy opposed this. She tried to soothe him and disuade him from his intention, but he was adamant. He said to Mummy again and again, "You're mad, you old procuress...Phyllis is mine...you ask her?

Mummy heard his abuses for quite some time and spoke to him in persuasive tones, "Chadda, my son, why don't you understand...she is young, too young!"

In her tremulous voice there was a rebuke and a plea, but Chadda was obstinate. At that time the only object he had in view was Phyllis and her possession. I looked at Phyllis and for the first time realised that she really was very young. She couldn't have been more than fifteen. Her pale face surrounded by silvery clouds quavered like the first drops of rain.

Chadda caught her by the arm, pulled her towards him and after the style of film stars crushed her against his breast. Mummy

shrieked in protest, "Chadda, release her..for God's sake ....Chadda let her go..."

When Chadda did not release Phyllis from his embrace, Mummy slapped him across his face and said, "Get out, get out!"

Chadda stood aghast. He pushed Phyllis away from him and walked out of the room, glaring angrily at Mummy. I got up, took leave of Mummy and followed Chadda.

On reaching Felicity Cottage I found Chadda sprawling across his face buried in his pillow. He was fully dressed, down to his shoes. I did not speak to him and withdrew to the other room, where I slept on the dining table.

I woke up late in the morning. It was ten o'clock. Chadda had left early, no one knew where he had gone. I was coming out of the bathroom when I heard his voice. It came from the garage. I stopped. He was saying to someone, "She's unique!...by God she is unique...you should pray to God that when you are her age you should be as great as she is."

There was a strange bitterness in his tone. I could not make out whether it was directed against himself or the person he was speaking to. I did not think it proper to eavesdrop and moved away. I waited for Chadda for about half an hour but he did not appear. I then left for Parhbatnagar.

My wife was in a moderate mood, but Harish's wife was worried as he had not yet returned home. I told her that he was still asleep. I had had enough of the change in Poona. I asked Harish's wife for leave. She was formal and asked us to stop for some days more. Before I left Felicity Cottage I had decided that last night's incident provided me with enough food for thought for quite some time.

We set out and on the way began talking about Mummy. I told her exactly what had happened. Her explanation of Mummy's conduct was that Phyllis must be a relation of hers or that she wanted to keep back the girl for a better patron. I said nothing, neither contradicting nor agreeing with her.

After several days I received a letter from Chadda. There was a passing reference to that night's incident and about his

behaviour, he said, "That night I was an animal..may I be damned!"

Three months later I had to go to Poona on some important business. I went straight to Felicity Cottage. Chadda was not in. I met Gharib Nawaz as he came out of the garage fondling Shirin's little boy. He greeted me with great warmth. After some time Ranjit Kumar came in, walking slowly like a turtle and sat down without talking much. Whenever I asked him about some thing he made brief answers. During the conversation I made out that since that night Chadda had not been to Mummy's nor had she come to see him. The very next day she had arranged to send Phyllis back to her parents, from whom she had eloped with Sissy. Ranjit Kumar was sure that if Phyllis had remained in town for a few days more, he would have succeeded. Gharib Nawaz had no such disappointment; he was only sorry that she had gone away.

About Chadda I learnt that he had not been feeling well for some days. He had been running a fever and had not yet consulted a doctor; instead, he wondered about Chadda's indisposition. Ranjit Kumar walked out of the room. I looked out of the window and, as I had anticipated, saw him enter the garage.

I was waiting for an opportunity to ask Gharib Nawaz for some information about Shirin when Vankatray entered the room. He seemed much agitated. He said he was bringing Chadda, who had high fever, home in a tonga when he fainted on the way...Gharib Nawaz and I ran out. The tongawala held the unconscious Chadda. All of us lifted him, took him into the house and laid him on his bed. I felt his forehead. He really had very high fever; it could not have been less than a hundred and six degrees.

I asked Gharib Nawaz to go for a doctor . He consulted Vankatray who said, "I'll be back soon" and left the room. When he returned he was accompanied by Mummy, who came into the room panting for breath. Her eyes immediately sought Chadda and the moment she saw his inert figure she spoke in voice which was almost a shriek, "What's happened to my son."

When Vankatray told her that he had been unwell for some days she said, crossly, "Fine friends you're ...why was'nt I informed?"

She then gave various directions to Gharib nawaz, Vankatry and mysel; to rub Chadda's feet, to get ice and to fan him Chadda's condition had a very bad effect on her, but she composed herself and went away to call a doctor.

I do not know how Ranjit Kumar found out about Chadda, but he came into the room greatly disturbed shortly after Mummy went out. On his asking, Vankatray told him all about Chadda fainting in the tonga and Mummy having gone for a doctor. Hearing this he felt greatly relieved.

I noticed that this relief was shared by the other two as well, as if all responsibility for Chadda's health now rested on Mummy's shoulders.

According to her directions, Chadda's feet were being rubbed, the ice bag applied to his forehead. When Mummy returned with the doctor he had started regaining consciousness. The doctor took a long time over his examination. From his expression it seemed that Chada's life was in danger. After the examination the doctor took Mummy out of the room. I looked through the iron bars of the window and saw the hessian curtain of the garage moving.

After some time Mummy came back to the room and at once assured Gharib Nawaz, Vankatray and Ranjit Kumar that there was nothing to worry about. Chadda had opened his eyes and was listening to what Mummy was saying. He was not surprised to see Mummy but he seemed a bit puzzled. He soon put things together and taking hold of Mummy's hand, pressed it, saying. "Mummy, you're great!"

Mummy sat down on the bed near him. She was affection personified. She felt his burning forehead with her hand, smiled and said, "My child...my poor child!"

This brought tears to Chadda's eyes, but he immediately tried to check them and said, "No, Mummy your child is a scoundrel of the first water...Go get your late husband's pistol and blast my chest."

Mummy smacked Chadda lightly on the cheek and said, "Don't talk rot." Then she got up and like an experienced and energetic

nurse said to us, "Boys Chadda is ill and I've to take him to hospital...understand?"

We understood. Gharib Nawaz made arrangements for a taxi. We lifted Chadda and put him into the car. Chadda protested several times. What was all this fuss about, why should he be committed to a hospital? Mummy told him again and again that he was not seriously ill but it was more convenient to get treatment at a hospital.

Chadda was usually very stubborn, but in his present state of mind, he could not veto Mummy's decision.

Chadda was admitted to the hospital. Mummy drew me aside and said he was dangerously ill. He had the plague. When she said that I felt as if my blood had suddenly been drained out of me. Mummy was very worried but she was confident that he would pull through and be his normal self again.

The treatment continued. The hospital was a private one and the doctors took great interest, but several complications set in. His skin began to crack and the fever continued to rise. The doctors advised that he should be removed to Bombay but Mummy would not agree. She removed him in that condition to her cottage.

I could not prolong my stay in Poona and returned to Bombay from where I telephoned regularly to find out about his progress. I had no hope that he would survive the plague but slowly he began to recover. I had to go to Lahore in response to a court summons and when I returned after about a fortnight my wife handed me a letter from Chadda. It only said "Mummy the Great has snatched her son out of the very jaws of death!"

These few words said much, they comprised a veritable ocean of emotion. Quite unlike myself I spoke to my wife with great emotions about Mummy's devotion. Even she was impressed and said, "Such women are sometimes capable of great devotion."

I wrote two or three letters to Chadda but received none in reply. I came to know later that Mummy had sent him away to stay with a friend of hers at Lonavala for a change of air. He stayed

there about a month. The day he returned to Poona, I happened to be there.

The severe attack of plague had left him very weak, but he was as boisterous and buoyant as ever. He talked about his illness as if it had been a minor bicycle accident. Now that he had recovered he did not like to discuss his illness.

During Chadda's absence there had been some minor changes in Felicity Cottage. The brothers, Shakil and Aqil had moved elsewhere, perhaps, because they felt that the atmosphere there was not conducive to the success of their efforts to promote a film producing company of their own. Their place had been taken by Sen a Bengali music director. A young boy, Ram Singh, who had run away from his home in Lahore, shared his room. He ran errands for almost everyone in Felicity Cottage. He was a very nice and well-behaved boy. He had come to Chadda, when at Mummy's insistence, he was about to leave for Lonavala. Chadda told Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar that they should take him in. He established himself in Sen's room as it had ample accommodation.

Ranjit Kumar had been cast as the hero in the company's new picture and had been told that if it was a success he would be given a chance at directing the next picture. Chadda had succeeded in getting fifteen hundred rupees in lump sum out of his two years arrears of pay. He said to Ranjit Kumar, "My dear, if you want to make money, have the plague...I think it is more lucrative than being a hero or a director."

Gharib Nawaz had just returned from Hyderabad and consequently Felicity Cottage wore a slightly more prosperous look. On the clothes-line outside the garage I saw *shalwars* and *kamizees* which were new and of expensive materials. Shirin's child had new toys.

I had to stay in Poona for about fifteen days. Harish was on the brink of romance with the heroine of his new picture. He, hesitated and there was cause for this. The girl was Punjabi and her husband was a well built powerful man with huge handle bar moustaches. Chadda urged him on, ? "Don't bother about that sala...prize-fighter husbands of Punjabi actresses, however, large their moustaches, always fall flat on their backs in the arena of

love....All you have to do is to learn from me some heavy weight Punjabi abuse...I'll charge a hundred rupees per abuse...they'll be invaluable in difficult situations...:

Harish had learnt six choice expletives, with their proper Punjabi intonation, in exchange for a whisky bottle for each, but so far there had been no occasion in his amatory pursuits to test their efficacy.

Parties and sprees at Mummy's house continued as before. Polly, Dolly, Kitty, Amelia, Thelma and others came to all of them. As usual Vankatray devoted himself to teaching Thelma toras of the Kathakali and Tandeo dances and she made earnest attempts to master them. Gharib Nawaz was again and again touched for money and Ranjit Kumar, who had been given the leading role in the new picture, took any girl he liked to show her the moon. Chadda's naughty limericks were as popular as before...Only she never came again; the girl with that amazing hair which had defied Chadda's powers of description. At these parties Chadda's eyes never sought her, but whenever his eyes met Mummy's he lowered them and I felt that he had not yet forgotten his mad behaviour that night; its memory seemed to hurt him and sometimes after his fourth peg he would involuntarily say, "Chadda...you are damned brute!"

At this Mummy would compress her lips and smile faintly as if with its sweetness she wanted to coat the words, "Don't talk rot!" which silenced him.

Chadda continued to gibe at Vankatray. Whenever Vankatray got drunk and started on his father's love for him or his wife's beauty, Chadda would shut him up rather brusquely and poor Vankatray would hold his tipsy tongue and mentally tuck away his Matriculation certificate in some inner pocket!

Mummy was the same -- Mummy to Polly, Dolly, Chadda, Ranjit Kumar and others, looking after soda supplies, food and all arrangements with the same enthusiasm and efficiency. She still wore gaudy dresses and her make-up was as loud as ever, her wrinkles peeping out from beneath layers of powder and rouge. To me they now appeared holy so holy that the plague germs had not even touched her. The wrinkles seemed to have over-awed and scared them away...even from Chadda's body

because it was favoured with the protection of those sacred wrinkles, which were always coated with such garish colours.

When Vankatray's wife had a miscarriage, it was Mummy's timely help which saved her life. Thelma in her keenness to learn Indian dancing got involved with a Marwari dancer. One day she suddenly discovered that she had contracted a dreaded disease. She came to Mummy who scolded her, damned her, and told her that she would never have anything to do with her in the future , but at the sight of tears in Thelma's eyes, her heart softened and the same evening she told her sons about Thelma's plight and requested them to arrange for her treatment. When Dolly won five hundred rupees in a crossword competition, Mummy forced her to give at least half the amount to Gharib Nawaz who then was in straightened circumstances. She had said to Dolly, "You give him the money now...you can get it back later on..." During my stay she asked me several times about my `missus' and expressed concern at the fact that after the death of our first child, several years ago, we had not yet had another. She never had much to say to Ranjit Kumar. She did not seem to like his exhibitionism and had hinted at it on some occasions. She detested Sen, the music director, whom Chadda sometimes brought with him. She said, "Don't bring that vile person here." "Chadda used to ask her why and she used to reply with great composure, "I find him rather foreign to the atmosphere here ... he doesn't belong here." Chadda would laugh at this explanation.

Suffused with the warmth of the gathering at Mummy's house I returned to Bombay. These parties had an atmosphere all their own, an atmosphere essentially epicurean, charged with sex and sustained by carousing. There were no undercurrents or subtleties ; everything was as obvious as the advanced pregnancy of a woman. Outwardly, there was inelegance, awkwardness and distortion keeping an observer perpetually in a state of suspense, not knowing whether to make a comment or not, but in reality everything was correct, orderly and graceful.

The next morning, newspapers carried a report about the murder of Sen, the music director. He had been killed in Poona in Felicity Cottage. The name of his assassin was given as Ram Singh and his age as fourteen or fifteen years. I immediately put

in a trunk call to Poona but couldn't contact any one who could give me any information.

A week later I got a letter from Chadda giving me the full details of the murder. All were asleep at night when someone fell on Chadda's bed. Muttering angrily he got up and switched on the light. It was Sen, drenched in blood. Chadda had hardly recovered his wits when Ram Singh appeared at the door. He had a knife in his hand. Immediately, Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar came into the room. Felicity Cottage came to life. Ranjit Kumar and Gharib Nawaz seized Ram Singh and took the knife away from him. Chadda lay Sen on his bed and was about to ask him about his injuries when the death rattle sounded in his throat and he died.

Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar were holding on to Ram Singh but both of them were trembling. When Sen breathed his last, Ram Singh asked Chadda, "Bhaiaji, is he dead?"

When Chadda replied in the affirmative Ram Singh turned to Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar and said, "Please release me..I won't run away."

Chadda did not know what to do. He immediately sent his servant for Mummy. When she arrived, all felt greatly relieved as she took charge of the situation. She had Ram Singh released and after some time took him with her to the police station, where he made a statement. For several days Chadda and his companions were much upset and busy answering questions by the police, making statements and attending court. Mummy was on her feet all the time. Chadda was sure that Ram Singh would be acquitted and that is what happened. The lower court dismissed the case against him. Ram Singh had not deviated from his original statement at the police station. Mummy had said to him, "..Don't worry...tell the truth about what happened..."and he had followed her advice. In his statement he said Sen had offered to make him a play-back singer. He was keenly interested in music and Sen was a very competent singer himself. He got entangled with him and became the victim of his unnatural lust. Ram Singh loathed himself for it and was greatly troubled by his conscience. He became desperate and warned

Sen that he would kill him if he again tried to force him to submit..and that is what happened that night.

Ram Singh repeated this statement to the court. Mummy was present, her eyes radiating to him a message of hope and confidence, urging him to stick to the truth, for truth always triumphed in the end. "Your blood-stained hands," she said to Ram Singh, should not bother you for they were responsible for the extermination of a vile and loathsome thing and the ending of an unnatural relationship."

Ram Singh made his statement with great simplicity and honesty. The Magistrate was impressed and he pronounced him not guilty. Chadda said, "In this world of lies this was an astonishing victory for Truth...and all credit for it goes to my dear old Mummy!"

Chadda invited me to the party which was organised by inmates of Felicity Cottage to celebrate Ram Singh's acquittal, but I could not accept it as I was very busy in Bombay. Shakil and Aqil had returned to Felicity Cottage as other environments had not proved more felicitous in the promotion of their film company. They had again been taken on by their old company as assistant to some other assistants. They still had some of the money they had collected for their own film company. On Chadda's advice they contributed all this money to make the party a success. At this gesture Chadda said, "Now, after my fourth peg, I'll pray for the immediate setting up of your own film company!"

According to Chadda, Vankatray's behaviour at this party was quite unusual. When drunk he had abstained from saying anything about his father or his beautiful wife. Gharib Nawaz lent about two hundred rupees to Kitty for her pressing needs and had said to Ranjit Kumar, "You shouldn't make false promises to these poor girls...may be your conscience is clear, but how can you be sure of their needs?...You should give them something occasionally!"

At this party Mummy glowed with love and affection for Ram Singh. She asked every one to advise him to go back home. This was settled there and then and the next day Gharib Nawaz bought him his railway ticket. Shirin prepared food for his

journey. He was given a warm send off at the railway station and all of them waved to him till the train was out of sight.

This information I collected ten days after the party, when I visited Poona again on business. Felicity Cottage had not changed. It was like a caravansarai which does not change one bit even after thousands of caravans have stopped there. It was like a grain bin that was always fully stocked. Sweets were being distributed the day I arrived. Shirin had given birth to another son. Vankatray carried a tin of Glaxo's powdered milk, which was very scarce those days. He had managed to get two tins for his own child and had brought one of them for Shirin's new baby. Chadda stuffed the last two *laddus* into his mouth and said to Vankatray. "You miracle-man ... you've produced a tin of Glaxo..you're a wonder, but take heed...don't you dare utter a word about that *sala* father of yours or your *sali* wife!"

Vankatray replied very naively, *"Salay;* I'm not drinking now...It's the drink that talks...but, really by God, my wife is very beautiful".

Chadda let out such a loud guffaw of laughter that poor Vankatray did not have a chance to say anything more. After that Chadda, Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar gave me their attention and we began a discussion on the screen play I had managed to sell, with Harish's help, to a film producer in Poona. After some time we found ourselves discussing a name for Shirin's new son. Hundreds were suggested, but Chadda did not like any one of them. At last I suggested, Masood. Chadda did not like it very much, but agreed to it as the tentative name.

I felt that Chadda, Gharib Nawaz and Ranjit Kumar were not their usual selves. They seemed a bit depressed. I thought this might be due to the autumn season during which listlessness overcomes everyone. Shirin's new baby could also have been responsible for their comparatively low spirits, but this was not logical,. Perhaps it was due to the tragedy of Sen's murder?...I did not know the reason but all of them seemed rather sad. They laughed and talked lightly but their hearts seemed heavy.

I wrote my screen play at Harish's house in Parbhatnagar. This took me exactly seven days. I was rather surprised that no one from Felicity Cottage had come to see me. I wondered why

Chadda had neglected me. Vankatray also had not called. I was not so intimate with Ranjit Kumar and did not expect him to come all the way to Parbhatnagar to see me. About Gharib Nawaz I thought he might have gone on a visit to Hyderabad.... And Harish was trying to make a firm resolve to make love to the heroine of his new picture in her own home in the presence of her large moustached husband.

I was in the midst of writing the scenario of an interesting part of my story when Chadda burst in on me as if he were the Devil himself. He had hardly entered the room when he asked me. "Have you got anything for this trash?"

He meant my screen play for which I had received the second instalment two days ago. "Yes," I replied, "I got the second thousand the day before yesterday."

"Where is that thousand?" he asked and advanced toward my coat.

"In the pocket."

He put his hand into my pocket and took out four hundred rupee notes and said, "Come to Mummy's this evening...there's a party on."

Before I could ask him about the party he had left. That sadness which I had noticed a few days back had not left him. He was rather melancholy. I wanted to give the matter some thought but my mind let me down for it was working overtime on the scenario.

I left Parbhatnagar at about half past five in the evening after exchanging a few words with Mrs Harish about my wife who had stayed back in Bombay. I reached Felicity Cottage at seven. Outside the garage I saw some wet daipers on the clothes-line. Near the water tap I found Shakil and Aqil playing with Shirin's eldest son. The garage's hessian curtain was raised and I thought I heard Mummy mentioned. Perhaps, Shirin was talking about her to Shakil and Aqil. Seeing me they stopped talking and looked rather sheepish. I asked about Chadda, and Aqil told me that I would find him at Mummy's house.

I could hear the noise well before I reached the house. They were all dancing, Gharib Nawaz with Polly, Ranjit Kumar with both Kitty and Amelia and Vankatray with Thelma. He was demonstrting some *mudras* of Kathakali dance. Chadda had Mummy in his arms and was carrying her about the room. All of them were pretty tight and wild. As I entered I felt the impact of the storm that was raging within the room. Chadda let out a whoop of joy and this was the signal for tumultuous welcome in which several Indian and semi-foreign voices helped to swell the noise. It momentarily deafened me. Mummy was very cordial and was almost too familiar with me. She took my hand in hers and said, "Kiss me, dear!"

But she herself kissed me on the cheek and dragged me into the milling crowd of dancers. Chadda at once shouted, "Stop...stop...let's start on the drinks again." He called out for his servant, "Prince of Scotland produce the new bottle". He was dead drunk. As he tried to open the bottle it slipped from his hand and was smashed to smithereens on the floor. Mummy wanted to scold him, but Chadda intervened. "Let him off, Mummy...what does it matter...it was only a bottle...here all hearts are broken!"

The party came to a hushed standstill, but Chadda soon dispelled the gloom with shouts of laughter. A new bottle came and a big peg was poured into each glass. Chadda began an incoherent speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen...you can all go to hell...Manto is here with us...he calles himself a great story writer, an expert on human psychology...he reaches...what do you call them...the innermost recesses of the human mind...but I say all that is nonsense...them who go down wells...I mean those who go down wells." He looked round the room. "It's a pity there's no expert on grammar here...there's Gharib Nawaz from Hyderabad and he pronounces Q's as K's and who in his Hyderabadi idiom would say he met you yesterday even if he had met you ten years ago. Shame on his Nizam of Hyderabad who has so many thousand tons of gold and millions of precious stones but not a single Mummy...I was referring to those who go down wells...what did I say was all nonsense?...In the Punjab, they are

called *tobas*, they dive into deep wells...they understand human psychology far better than he does...I, therefore, say...."

Everyone burst out cheering and shouted "Long Live Chadda!"

He winced and said, "This is a conspiracy...engineered by Manto...I had tried to preach the hymn of hate, like Herr Hitler...I wanted you to shout slogans demanding death.... But all of you are yourselves dead...I...I..." He became sentimental.."I...who that night in this room...annoyed Mummy over that girl with hair of the colour of scales on a snake's belly...God knows why I thought I was Don Juan...but no, it was not at all difficult to possess her...a single kiss with my thick lips and I would have sucked dry the essence of her virginity...but that would have been caddish...She was not of age, the age of co. ent...she was so young, so frail, so weak of character...characterless...character..." He paused and ruminated over the use of the word and then began again, "Ladies and gentlemen, she was so young so frail, so...that had she been a party to sin that night, she would have kept it to herself all her life or completely forgotten about it...this would have hurt my pride...I'm glad Mummy cut me off...now I'll shut up...I had planned a long speech, but I'm afraid it's beyond me...I'll have another peg.

He had another drink. All were silent during his oration. They did not speak even after he had finished. Mummy was thoughtful and her wrinkles under layers of powder and rouge accentuated the expression. Chadda seemed to have exhausted himself and moved about the room as if looking for a corner where he could lose something, a corner he would always remember. I asked him, "What is the matter, Chadda?"

He laughed and said, "Nothing...nothing at all...the fact is that tonight the whisky hasn't kicked my mind in the pants!"

His laughter sounded hollow.

Vankatray sent Thelma away from him and called me over to sit by his side. He began talking about various things and then, inevitably came round to his father, who, he said, was a great man. He had his audiences in raptures whenever he played the harmonium. Vankatray then spoke of his wife, her beauty and

disclosed that his father had selected the girl and had married them off when they were still children. Sen, the music director came into the conversation and about him he said, "Mister Manto, he was contemptible...he said he was a pupil of Khan Sahib Abdul Karim Khan...he lied...he must have received training from a Bengali pimp..."

The clock struck two. Chadda stopped jitterbugging pushed Kitty away from him. He came up to Vankatray and smacked his pumpkin-like head, saying, "Stop talking nonsense...come on give us a song but not the classical stuff."

Vankatray began to sing, almost at once. His voice was nothing much to write home about. The words were not clear and distinct, but he sang with great sincerity. He sang two or three film songs, all of them in *Malkaus*. They were sad songs and everyone in the room was in low spirits. Mummy and Chadda would look at each other but the moment their eyes met, they would look away. Gharib Nawaz had tears in his eyes. Chadda laughed loudly and said, "These Hyderabadis have very weak tear ducts...they are dripping in and out of season..."

Gharib Nawaz wiped his tears and began dancing with Amelia. Vankatray put on the gramophone, its blunt needle producing a squeaky tune. Chadda caught Mummy in his arms, lifted her off the floor and began jumping and shouting. His voice was hoarse, like the *mirasis* who ruin theirs by singing loudly and continuously at marriage feasts.

These wild antics and noise continued until four in the morning. When the clock struck the hour, Mummy at once sobered up and became silent. She turned to Chadda and said, "Let's call it a day." Chadda picked up a bottle and put it to his mouth. When it was empty, he threw it away and said to me, "Come, Manto, let's go."

I wanted to take leave of Mummy, but Chadda pulled me away, saying, "No leave-taking or farewells today."

We were walking out of the room when I heard Vankatray crying. I stopped, saying, "Wait, let's see what's wrong." But Chadda pushed me forward and said, "His tear ducts, too, are weak."

During our short walk to Felicity Cottage, Chadda did not utter a word. Before going to bed, I wanted to ask him about this strange party, but he said "I'm very sleepy," and he went to bed.

In the morning I was leaving the bathroom, when I noticed Gharib Nawaz leaning against the garage, near its hessian covered entrance. He was crying. On seeing me, he wiped his tears away. I went up to him and asked him the reason. "Mummy's gone, "he said.

"Where?"

I don't know." Gharib Nawaz walked away towards the road.

I went in and found Chadda still in bed. From his looks I was certain that he had not had a wink of sleep. When I asked him about Mummy he smiled and said, "She went away...she had to leave Poona by the morning train."

"But why?" I asked.

When Chadda replied there was bitterness in his voice, "The Government did not like her activities...they regarded the gatherings and parties at her house as objectionable...because the police wanted to hold her affectionate and loving nature in ransom...they wanted to call her mother and use her as a procuress...she was involved in a case some time back and investigation was pending...at last, the Government accepted the police findings and ordered her to leave the town...if she was a prostitute or a procuress or her existence was a menace to society, she should have been exterminated...why was the filth of Poona allowed to leave this town and settle in some other city?"

Chadda laughed very loudly and did not say anything for quite some time. When he spoke again, he almost choked with emotion. "I'm sorry, Manto, that with this unclean thing something very hallowed should have left Poona...it was that something which purged my body and soul of the contemptible lust that had overpowered me that night...but I should not be sorry...wherever she goes there'll be young men like me with misdirected energies and loathsome lusts...I entrust my Mummy to their care! Long Live Mummy!...Let's look for Gharib Nawaz, he must be in quite a state, the way he weeps...these

Hyderabadis have very weak tear ducts...dripping in and out of season."

I looked at Chadda. Tears floated in his eyes like bloated carcasses.

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